JOUR COMICS

WONDER!

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河 あきら

Akira Kawa

3

JOUR COMICS

WONDER ワンダー ③

AKIRA KAWA

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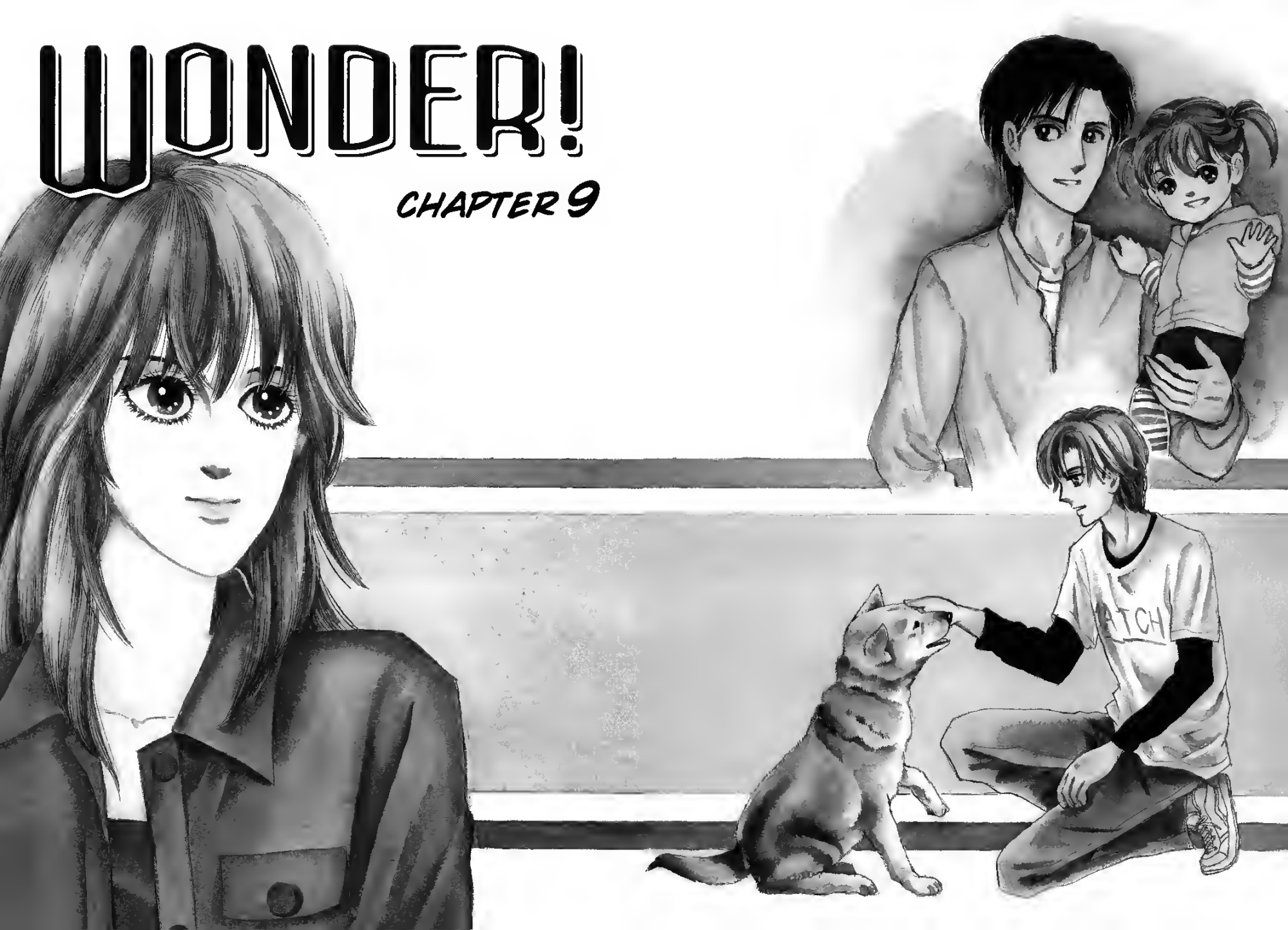
FWUP...

WONDER!

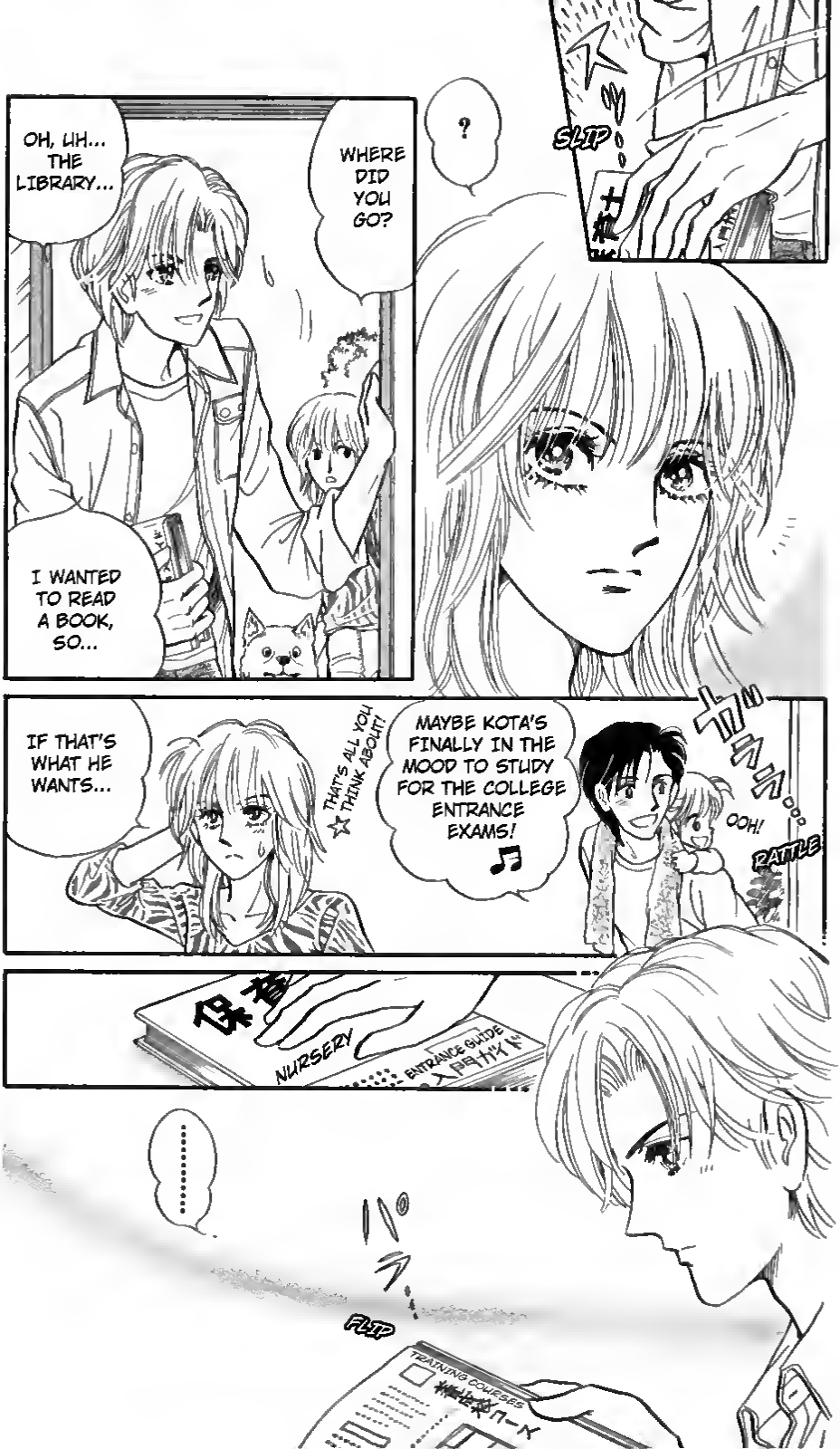
CHAPTER 9

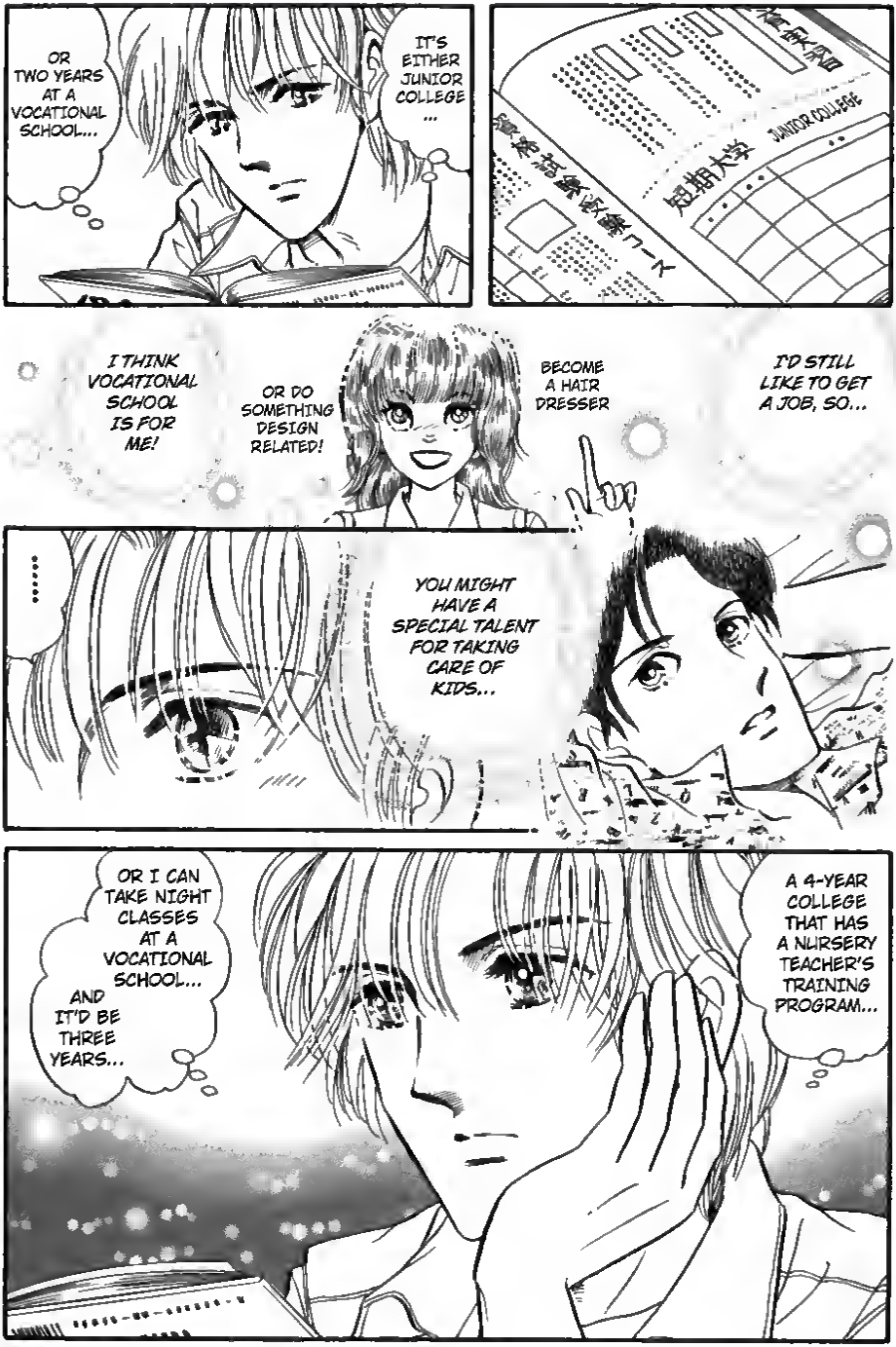


WONDER!

FOUR MONTHS HAVE PASSED...
SINCE KAORI'S MOTHER REMARRIED THE MAN WHO SHE DIVORCED LONG AGO, AND MOVED IN...
RIGHT BESIDE THE HIRANO FAMILY
BANG
BANG
BANG
THAT OUGHTA MAKE THIS DOOR OPEN AND CLOSE A LITTLE MORE SMOOTHLY!
RATTLE

GOODNESS! I'M GLAD WE MOVED, BUT THIS OLD HOUSE IS PRACTICALLY FALLING APART EVERYWHERE!
HEH HEH... IT'S REALLY NOTHING...
SOMESING ELSH!
NOW ISN'T YOUR DAD SOMETHING ELSE, MIYA?
TAIYO LOOKS LIKE HE LIKES THAT MAN, TOO.
LIVELY!
AHHH... I'LL PASS! YOU'RE TOO GOOD, SIR!
LIVELY!
TAIYO, HOW 'BOUT ANOTHER GAME LATER?
LIVELY!
UH. HI...
I'M HOME!
HI, KOTA!
WOOF!
OH, WELL! IT'S STILL BETTER THAN WHEN WE HAD TO LIVE WITH THIS BAD-MOUTHING MOTHER OF MINE!
.....
WHO WOULD'VE GUESSED THAT YOUR HUSBAND WOULD BE USEFUL FOR SOMETHING ?!


SLIP
?
WHERE DID YOU GO?
OH, UH... THE LIBRARY...
I WANTED TO READ A BOOK, SO...
OOH!
RATTLE
MAYBE KOTA'S FINALLY IN THE MOOD TO STUDY FOR THE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS!
THAT'S ALL YOU THINK ABOUT!
IF THAT'S WHAT HE WANTS...
保育
NURSERY
ENTRANCE GUIDE
FLIP
TRAINING COURSES


IT'S EITHER JUNIOR COLLEGE...
OR TWO YEARS AT A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL...
JUNIOR COLLEGE
短期大学
I'D STILL LIKE TO GET A JOB, SO...
BECOME A HAIR DRESSER
OR DO SOMETHING DESIGN RELATED!
I THINK VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IS FOR ME!
YOU MIGHT HAVE A SPECIAL TALENT FOR TAKING CARE OF KIDS...
A 4-YEAR COLLEGE THAT HAS A NURSERY TEACHER'S TRAINING PROGRAM...
OR I CAN TAKE NIGHT CLASSES AT A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL... AND IT'D BE THREE YEARS...

OH, KOTAAA!
WIWW YOU OPEN DA DOH?!
TAP! TAP!
OPEN DA DOH!!
O.K.!
SLIDE
...WONDER, DID YOU LOOSEN YOUR CHAIN, AGAIN?
ARF!
HAHAHAHA!
HEY, KAORI! DO YOU NEED ME TO GET ANYTHING FROM THE STORE?
WANDA AND I WIWW GO FO WALKIE, OKWAY?!
ARF!
...WEREN'T YOU STUDYING ?

HEY THERE, MIYA!
OOH!
I SAW WONDER OUTSIDE, SO I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT BE IN HERE!
MARKET
HINAMI!
SORRY... I GUESS I DIDN'T SEE YOU...
AM I THAT EASY TO FORGET?!
YOU'RE SOOO MEAN! I SAW YOU AT THE BOOK STORE!
HINAMI, I SAW YOU THE OTHER DAY!
WHY DID YOU JUST IGNORE ME WHEN I CALLED YOU?
HUH? DID WE MEET?
MIYA... YOU'RE ALLOWED TO BUY ONLY ONE CANDY, OKAY?
OKWAY!
THAT WAS FAST!
...WHY DON'T YOU GET LOST FOR A LITTLE BIT?

I GOT BORED OF DOING THAT STUFF AFTER JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL, ANYWAY!
I WAS JUST PLAYING AROUND, OKAY?
I'M KIDDING! I'M KIDDING!
AHAHAHA!
OH, BY THE WAY... IKUMI, I WANTED TO ASK YOU SOMETHING?
HEY!
IF YOU JUST PUT THAT IN YOUR POCKET, NO ONE WILL NOTICE!
PSST!
?
WHAT ARE YOU TEACHING HER?!?!
NO... NOT THAT...
ABOUT WHAT? HOW TO SHOPLIFT?
HUH?
...I WANTED TO ASK ABOUT THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL YOU'RE THINKING OF GOING TO...
DO YOU KNOW IF IT HAS A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER'S TRAINING PROGRAM?

I HAVEN'T DECIDED WHAT I'M GONNA DO, YET...
SO I HAVEN'T TALKED IT OVER WITH TAIYO OR KAORI...
WHAT YOUNG PARENTS!
WEEE!
REALLY? SO YOU WANT TO BECOME A TEACHER AT A NURSERY SCHOOL?
WAIT! SO I'M THE FIRST PERSON YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT THIS WITH?!
SO... THIS IS LIKE A SECRET BETWEEN JUST THE TWO OF US?!
WELL, I'M NOT TRYING TO HIDE IT OR ANYTHING LIKE THAT...
I KNOW IT MIGHT BE HARD TO BELIEVE, BUT I CAN KEEP THIS MOUTH SHUT!!
OHMYGOD!! I PROMISE I WON'T TELL ANYONE! I PROMISE!
SQUEEEAL!

HAHAHAHAHA!
HAHAHAHAHA!
HUH?
WELCOME HOME! THANKS FOR TAKING CARE OF THE SHOPPING!
WHERE'S MIYA?
SHE'S OUT IN THE YARD PLAYING WITH MR. HATANAKA.
HAHAHA!

GIGGLE!
MR. HATANAKA
MIYA, AREN'T YOU ADORABLE ?!?!
YOU'RE SO CUTE THAT GRANDPA WANTS TO EAT YOU RIGHT UP!
?
HAHAHAHAHA!
I CAUGHT HIM SEVERAL TIMES TRYING TO LAY A HAND ON YOU BEHIND MY BACK...
THAT MAN WAS PARTICULARLY KIND TO YOU...
...WAS PLANNING ON DOING THINGS TO YOU, HIS STEP-DAUGHTER ...
STOP IT!

KAORI?
...!
PUT MIYA DOWN, NOW!!
HUH?
SORRY... SHE'S SWEATY FROM THE WALK...
AND I HAVE TO CHANGE HER, SO...
OH... RIGHT.
BYE BYE, GWAMPAAA!
.....
カランカラン
RATTLE

OY!
YOU WERE IN THE MIDDLE OF READING, WEREN'T YOU?
IT'S FINE, KOTA.
.....
WERE YOU THINKING ABOUT WHAT YOUR MOTHER HAD TOLD YOU?
YOU DON'T GET IT, TAIYO!
YOUR STEP-FATHER IS DIFFERENT NOW...
NEVER MIND THAT IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO... EVEN IF IT WAS TRUE... IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS...
YOU USUALLY MAKE LIGHT OF THAT, DON'T YOU?
IF THEY WERE YOUR REAL PARENTS, YOU WOULDN'T CARE SO MUCH!!
WHAT'S SO WRONG ABOUT ME BEING GOOD TO YOUR PARENTS, HUH?!
!!
MR. HATANAKA IS STILL OUT IN THE YARD, GUYS...
IT WOULD BE NICE FOR YOU IF WE COULD ALL JUST HAPPILY CALL HIM STEPFATHER AND BE ONE BIG HAPPY FAMILY, WOULDN'T IT?
SNAP!

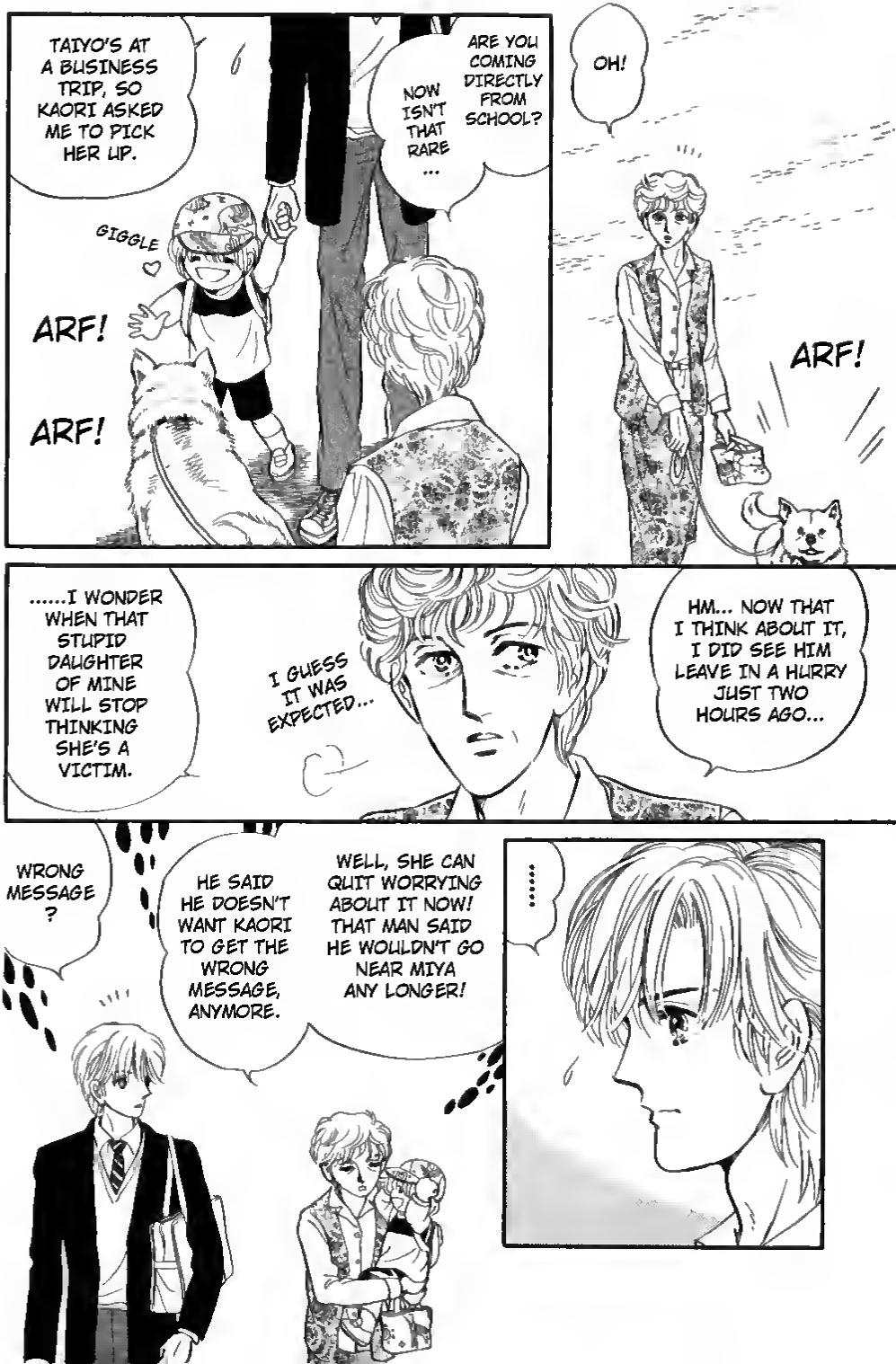
OKAY, OKAY!
THAT'S ENOUGH, BOY!
LICK!
LICK!
LICK!
LICK!
GOOD NIGHT!
WELL, GOOD NIGHT, THEN!
HEH! HEH!
I'M ALL LICKED OUT, NOW!
.....
WONDER ...
ARE YOU THINKING WHAT I'M THINKING ?
WOOF!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
WHAT DO YA THINK YER DOIN', HUH?!
STOP ACTING DUMB! WHAT DID YOU TALK TO IKUMI ABOUT, HUH?!
HEY, HINAMI!
SHE'S BEEN SAYING "IT'S A SECRET!" "IT'S A SECRET!" ALL DAY!
I TOLD YOU IT'S A SECRET BETWEEN THE TWO OF US!
TEE HEE!
OH, SAWAKI! YOU'RE SO STUBBORN!
TALK ABOUT?
DON'T WOMEN USUALLY WORK AT NURSERY SCHOOLS?
WHAT'S THAT?
NURSERY SCHOOL?
YOU IDIOTS! BOYS WORK AT THEM, TOO, NOWADAYS!
AHHHH! WHY DID YOU BLOW OUR SECRET?!
WE JUST TALKED ABOUT HOW I'M THINKING OF BEING A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER.

I'M USED TO IT...
HEY!! WHAT'RE YOU SAYING?!
SORRY ON BEHALF OF IKUMI AND THESE TWO DOPES.
MY FIRST LOVE WAS MY PRESCHOOL TEACHER ...
BUT THEN AGAIN, I CAN PICTURE YOU WORKING THERE, HINAMI!
WERE YOU GOING SOMEWHERE ?
SHOOT... BREAK TIME IS ALMOST UP. TALK TO YOU LATER!
.....
STOP USING THE PAY PHONE FOR ALL YOUR CALLS! IT'S SO STUPID!
I TOLD YOU TO BUY A CELL PHONE!
I WAS ACTUALLY THINKING OF TALKING WITH THE NURSERY SCHOOL!
HERE!
HEY! DON'T FOOL HIM INTO TAKING A COUPLE'S SHOT WITH YOU!!
LET ME SHOW YOU HOW TO USE IT! YOU PRESS THIS, THEN THIS, AND THEEEN...
SNAP
SO I WAS GONNA TELL KAORI THAT I'D GO AND PICK UP MIYA...

YEAH, I GOT A CALL FROM TAIYO AWHILE AGO...
HE SAID HE'S GONNA GRAB HIS THINGS AT THE HOUSE, THEN QUICKLY HEAD OUT!
HE SAID HE'S COMING HOME BY TOMORROW NIGHT AT THE EARLIEST...
BUSINESS TRIP?
IT'S A GOOD THING YOU CALLED! I WAS THINKING OF ASKING YOU TO PICK UP MIYA FOR ME.
I MEAN, IF I ASK MY MOM, SHE MIGHT END UP BRINGING THAT MAN ALONG WITH HER, TOO, RIGHT?
AND I DON'T REALLY WANT MIYA GETTING CLOSE TO HIM...
I THINK YOU'RE MAKING TOO MUCH OUT OF IT, KAORI...
OKAY, I'LL TRY TO GO EARLY!
YEAH... SINCE CLASS IS STARTING.

AND APPARENTLY ONLY 10% PASS THE EXAM EVERY YEAR.
I WENT TO A JUNIOR COLLEGE THAT HAD A TEACHER'S PROGRAM!
NURSERY
IS THAT SO?
BESIDES THAT AND GOING TO A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL, THERE'S ALSO TAKING THE NURSERY TEACHER'S EXAM TO GET YOUR LICENSE. BUT THERE'S A LOT OF OTHER REQUIREMENTS, TOO.
BESIDES, TOSHIYA'S ALWAYS HAPPY WHEN YOU'RE HERE, KOTA!
NOT AT ALL! IT WAS A PLEASURE!
ANYWAY, SORRY FOR BOTHERING YOU AT WORK.
BYE-BYEEE!
SEE YOU LATER, TOSHIYA!
HIS FATHER'S WORK SEEMS TO BE GOING WELL, AND HIS MOTHER DOESN'T SEEM TO BE HITTING HIM LIKE SHE DID BEFORE.
HOW'S HE BEEN LATELY?

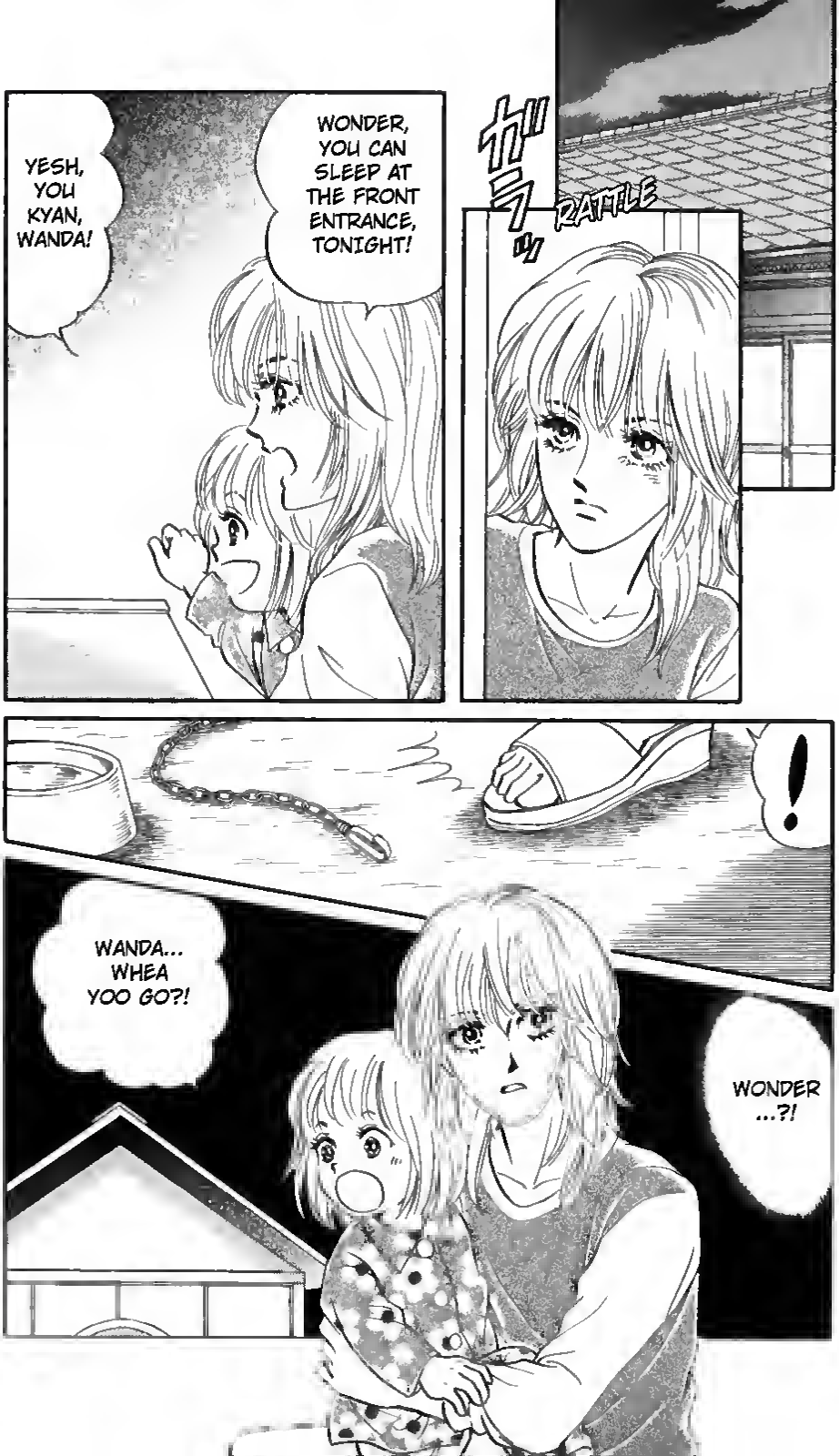

TAIYO'S AT A BUSINESS TRIP, SO KAORI ASKED ME TO PICK HER UP.
ARE YOU COMING DIRECTLY FROM SCHOOL?
NOW ISN'T THAT RARE ...
GIGGLE
ARF!
ARF!
OH!
ARF!
.....I WONDER WHEN THAT STUPID DAUGHTER OF MINE WILL STOP THINKING SHE'S A VICTIM.
I GUESS IT WAS EXPECTED...
HM... NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, I DID SEE HIM LEAVE IN A HURRY JUST TWO HOURS AGO...
WRONG MESSAGE ?
HE SAID HE DOESN'T WANT KAORI TO GET THE WRONG MESSAGE, ANYMORE.
WELL, SHE CAN QUIT WORRYING ABOUT IT NOW! THAT MAN SAID HE WOULDN'T GO NEAR MIYA ANY LONGER!
.....

BUT, KAORI ...
YOU KNOW I GO TO MY PART-TIME JOB THEN...
RUSH!!
KAORI, THAT'S NOT LIKE YOU.
.....
CAN'T YOU JUST NOT GO THIS TIME?
I MEAN, SINCE TAIYO ISN'T EVEN HERE...
GIMME DA KWOZE!
...I MEAN, I KNOW I CAN PROTECT MIYA BY MYSELF IF IT COMES TO THAT, BUT...
JUST IN CASE IT DOES COME TO THAT... I JUST DON'T WANT HIM TO EVER GET THE IDEA THAT HE'S IN THE SAME FAMILY AS ME, YOU KNOW...

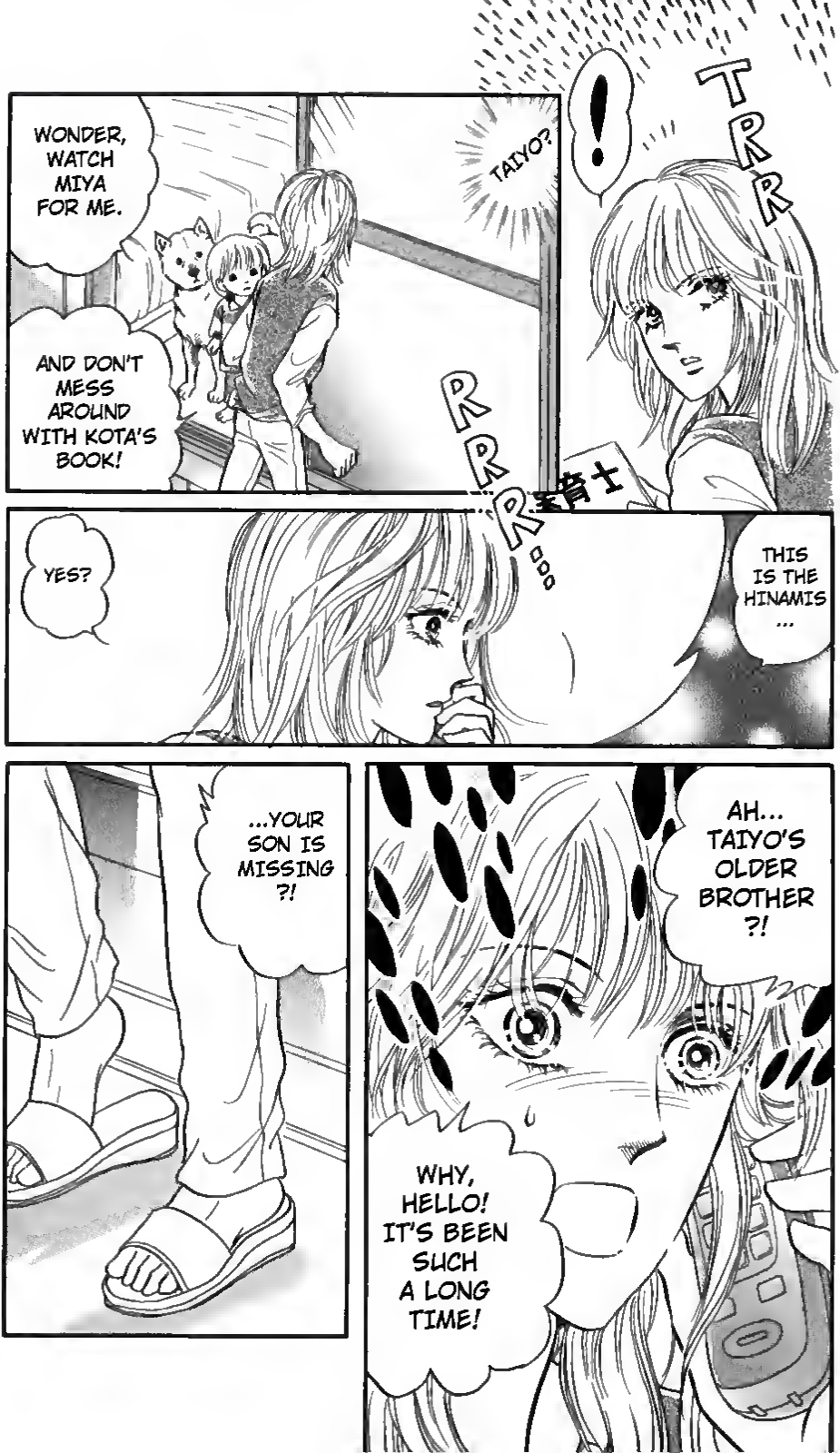
BACK WHEN I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING, I REALLY LIKED HIM AND EVEN THOUGHT OF HIM AS MY OWN FATHER.
BUT NOW... I DON'T WANT TO EVEN THINK ABOUT WHAT THAT NICE MAN'S REAL INTENTIONS MIGHT BE...
THAT'S WHY...
I'M NOT GONNA TAKE ANY CHANCES!
I WON'T LET ANYTHING HAPPEN THAT I MIGHT REGRET LATER ON...
ME WASHIE WOO!
I'LL INVITE MR. HATANAKA TO THE BAR.
IF I KEEP HIM AROUND THE BAR UNTIL MY WORK FINISHES, YOU'LL FEEL SAFER, RIGHT?
DON'T WORRY! BESIDES, WONDER WILL BE HERE!

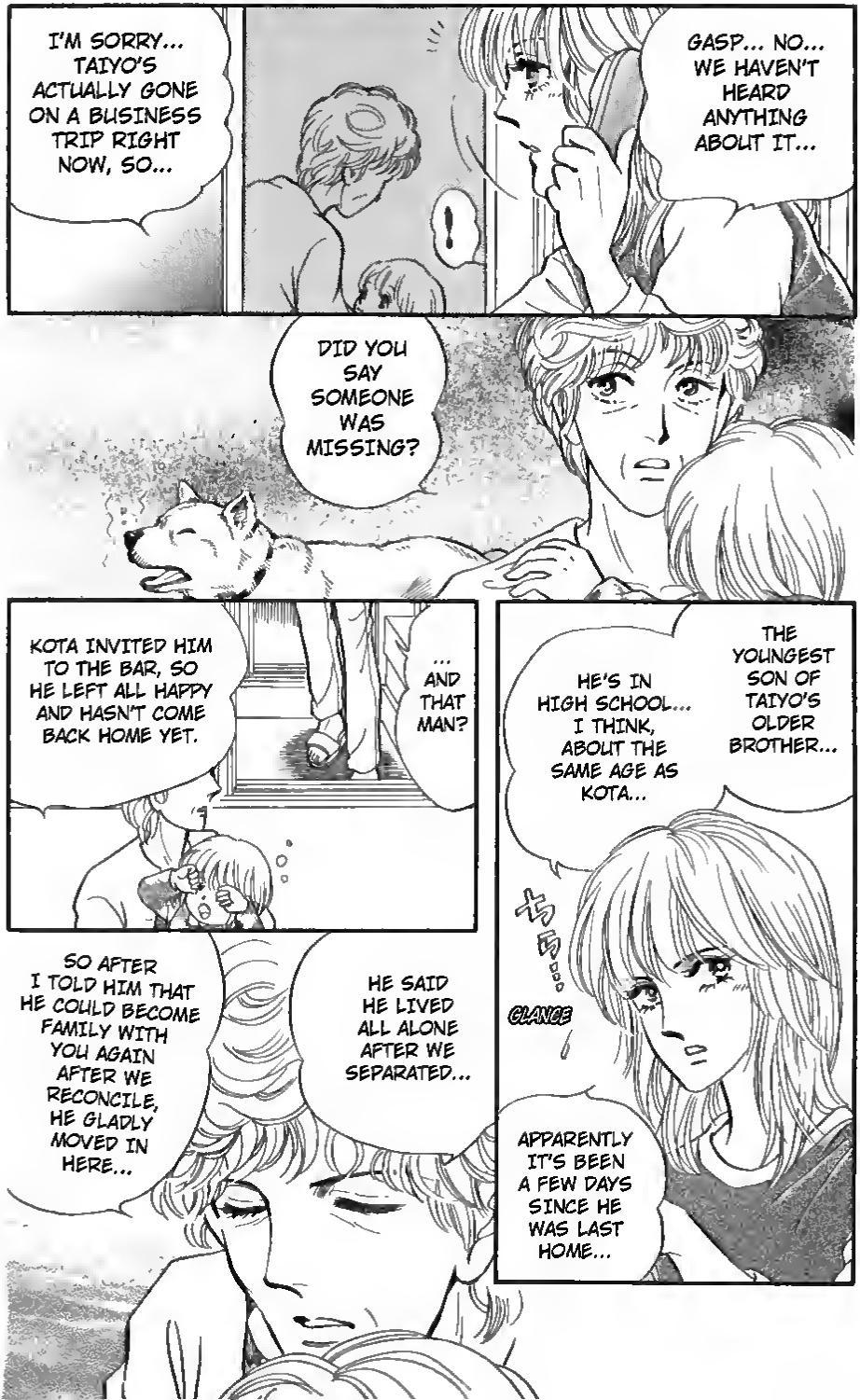
OH, MY... SO YOU'RE KAORI'S STEP-FATHER!
I SEPARATED WITH KAORI'S MOTHER JUST BEFORE KAORI WENT TO JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.
YOU START TO REALLY FEEL THE YEARS WHEN THEY GROW!
I UNDERSTAND COMPLETELY! I REMEMBER WHEN KOTA WAS JUST A LITTLE BOY!
THREE YEARS AGO, WHEN KOTA CAME HERE ALL GROWN UP, I DIDN'T KNOW WHETHER TO FEEL NOSTALGIC OR SURPRISED!
I MEAN, HIS MOTHER HAD PASSED AWAY, AND I HADN'T SEEN HIM SINCE HE WAS NINE YEARS OLD!
AT FIRST, I FELT BAD FOR HIM WHEN HIS UNCLE TOOK HIM IN AFTER THE FUNERAL...
BUT NOW... HE'S MORE THAN FAMILY TO US ALL!
.....
YOU'VE TOLD THAT STORY 100 TIMES!
HAHA!

WHEN I REMARRIED, KAORI WAS AROUND THE SAME AGE AS MY LITTLE GIRL...
I LOST MY WIFE AND DAUGHTER QUITE EARLY...
SO...
I EVEN THOUGHT OF HER AS MY REAL DAUGHTER ...
KU-UMPER.
AND THAT I COULD TAKE THE PLACE OF HER FATHER, WHO DIED YOUNG.
...SO I WAS REALLY EXCITED TO SEE KAORI GROW UP...
AND... NOW THAT SHE HAS A DAUGHTER... I'M NOT ALLOWED TO EVEN BE HAPPY FOR HER...
SOB
SOB
OF COURSE THERE'D BE STRANGE MISUNDER-STANDINGS IF I TRIED TO LOVE HER LIKE A FATHER...
BUT... IN THE END, I'M JUST ANOTHER MAN, SO...

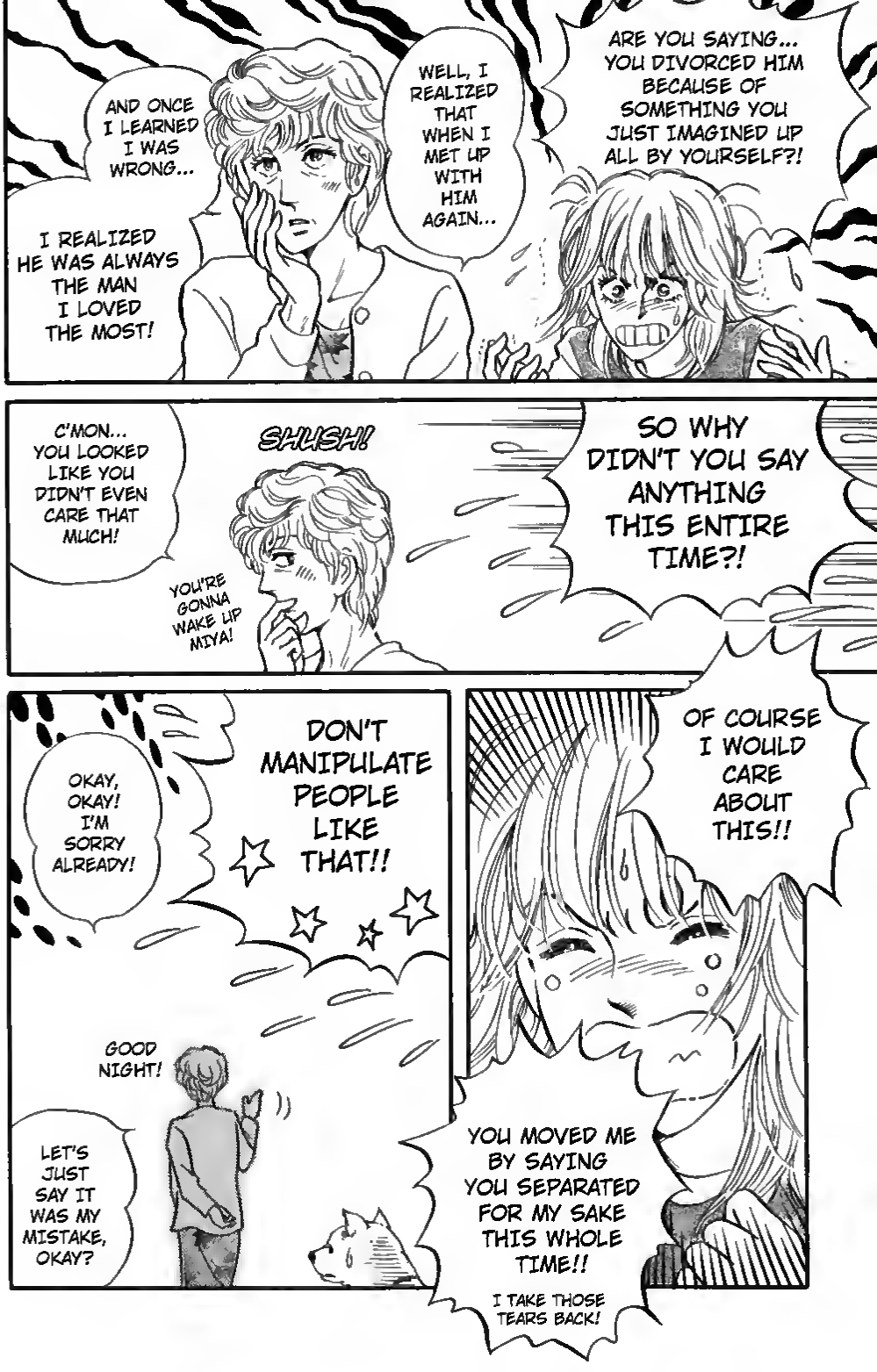

YESH, YOU KYAN, WANDA!
WONDER, YOU CAN SLEEP AT THE FRONT ENTRANCE, TONIGHT!
カラ
RATTLE
!
WANDA... WHEA YOO GO?!
WONDER ...?!

WHAT ARE YOU DOING IN KOTA'S ROOM?!
PATTER
PITTER
HEY!! DON'T BARGE IN HERE WHEN KOTA'S NOT AROUND, OKAY?!
PEEP!
WONDER!
YOU WERE IN THERE?!
GASP!
"NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER"?
CAN YOO WEED IT, PWEEZE?
HEY! ISH KOTA'S BOOK, MOMMY!
HUH?


WONDER, WATCH MIYA FOR ME.
AND DON'T MESS AROUND WITH KOTA'S BOOK!
TAIYO?
!
TRR
RRRR
YES?
THIS IS THE HINAMIS ...
...YOUR SON IS MISSING ?!
AH... TAIYO'S OLDER BROTHER ?!
WHY, HELLO! IT'S BEEN SUCH A LONG TIME!


I'M SORRY... TAIYO'S ACTUALLY GONE ON A BUSINESS TRIP RIGHT NOW, SO...
GASP... NO... WE HAVEN'T HEARD ANYTHING ABOUT IT...
DID YOU SAY SOMEONE WAS MISSING?
KOTA INVITED HIM TO THE BAR, SO HE LEFT ALL HAPPY AND HASN'T COME BACK HOME YET.
... AND THAT MAN?
THE YOUNGEST SON OF TAIYO'S OLDER BROTHER...
HE'S IN HIGH SCHOOL... I THINK, ABOUT THE SAME AGE AS KOTA...
GLANCE
APPARENTLY IT'S BEEN A FEW DAYS SINCE HE WAS LAST HOME...
HE SAID HE LIVED ALL ALONE AFTER WE SEPARATED...
SO AFTER I TOLD HIM THAT HE COULD BECOME FAMILY WITH YOU AGAIN AFTER WE RECONCILE, HE GLADLY MOVED IN HERE...

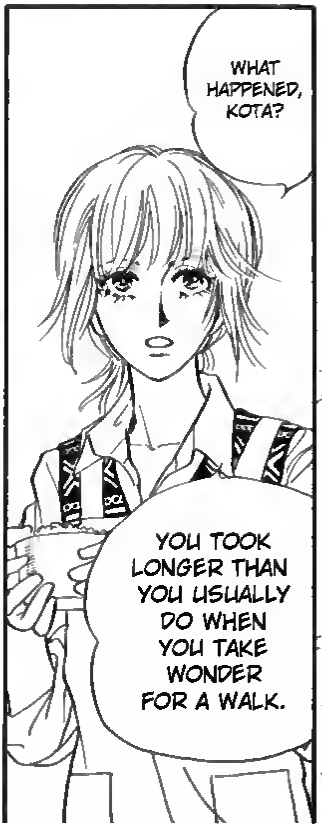
YOU WERE MY DEAR DAUGHTER, AND I WAS PROTECTIVE OF YOU... AND I SUSPECTED HE WAS TOUCHING YOU...
.....
BUT I FEEL FOR HIM, BECAUSE IT TURNS OUT I JUMPED TO THE WRONG CONCLUSION...
GASP!
WRONG CONCLUSION?!
WELL, I MEAN, I WAS YOUNG, SO I SUPPOSE I LET MY IMAGINATION RUN WILD!
EVERYONE MAKES MISTAKES RIGHT?
JUST HOLD IT!
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT ?!

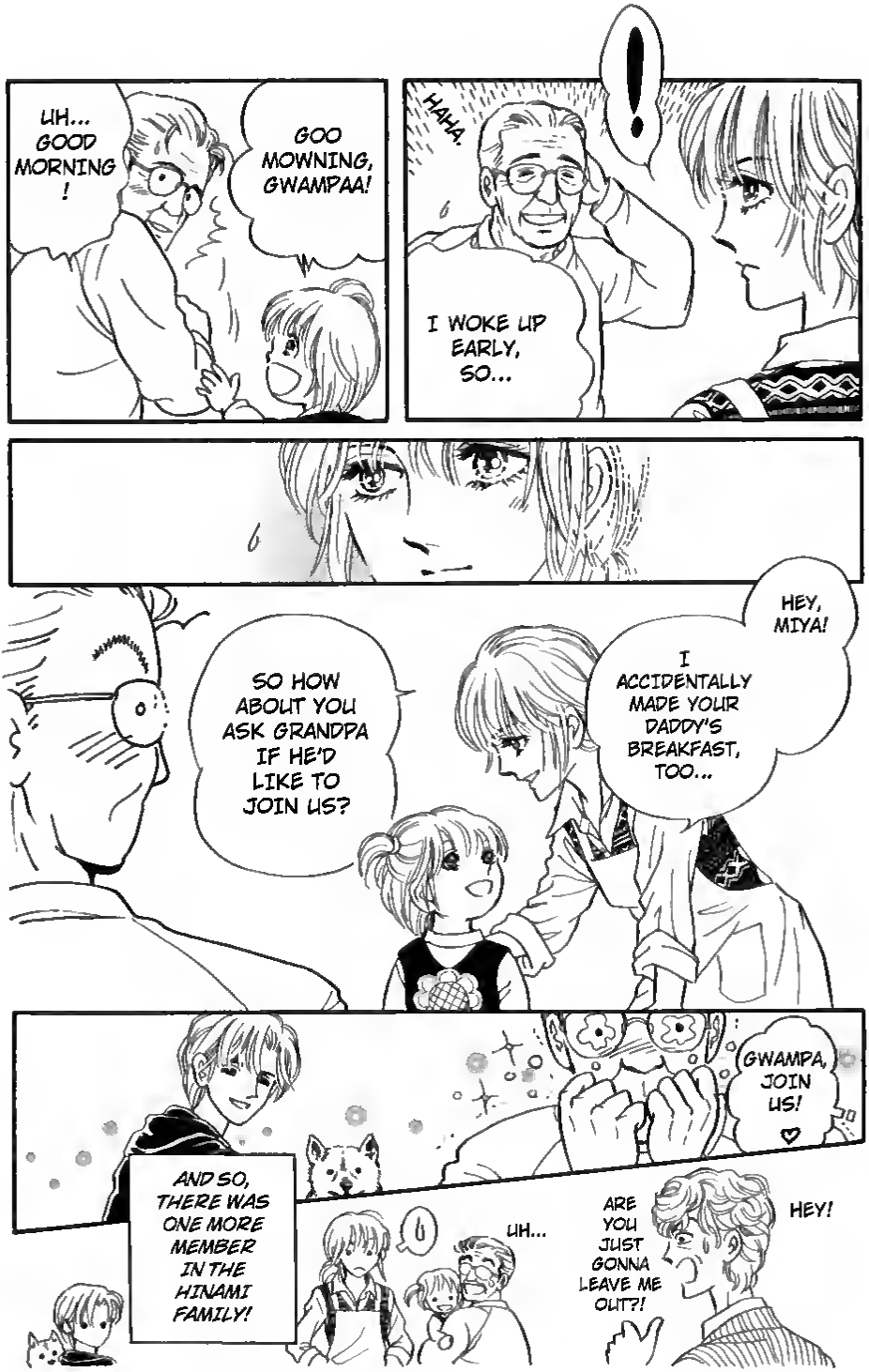

ARE YOU SAYING... YOU DIVORCED HIM BECAUSE OF SOMETHING YOU JUST IMAGINED UP ALL BY YOURSELF?!
WELL, I REALIZED THAT WHEN I MET UP WITH HIM AGAIN...
AND ONCE I LEARNED I WAS WRONG...
I REALIZED HE WAS ALWAYS THE MAN I LOVED THE MOST!
SO WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY ANYTHING THIS ENTIRE TIME?!
SHUSH!
C'MON... YOU LOOKED LIKE YOU DIDN'T EVEN CARE THAT MUCH!
YOU'RE GONNA WAKE UP MIYA!
OF COURSE I WOULD CARE ABOUT THIS!!
YOU MOVED ME BY SAYING YOU SEPARATED FOR MY SAKE THIS WHOLE TIME!!
I TAKE THOSE TEARS BACK!
DON'T MANIPULATE PEOPLE LIKE THAT!!
OKAY, OKAY! I'M SORRY ALREADY!
GOOD NIGHT!
LET'S JUST SAY IT WAS MY MISTAKE, OKAY?

ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
GROAN.
I'M SORRY... MAKING YOU LOOK OUT FOR ME LIKE THIS...
BUT... IT'S A GOOD THING, KOTA...
LEARNING THAT YOU HAD IT TOUGH, TOO...
SOB
I DIDN'T REALLY SUFFER ...
EVEN THOUGH I'M NOT TAIYO AND KAORI'S REAL SON...
I THINK WE'RE DEFINITELY BECOMING A REAL FAMILY...
AND EVEN THOUGH YOU SUFFERED, YOU NOW HAVE A GOOD FAMILY, RIGHT?
MR. HATANAKA, THAT ALSO MEANS YOU...
BAWL!

I DO.
KO... KOTAAA !!
WHIMPER WHIMPER
YOU... YOU CONSIDER ME A PART OF... YOUR FAMILY, TOO?!
WOOF! WOOF! WOOF!
I'M SO HAPPY TO HEAR THAAAT!
AND SO.

I WAS ALSO WITH MR. HATANAKA.
OH?


WHAT HAPPENED, KOTA?
YOU TOOK LONGER THAN YOU USUALLY DO WHEN YOU TAKE WONDER FOR A WALK.
ARF!
ARF!


UH... GOOD MORNING!
GOO MOWNING, GWAMPAA!
HAHA.
I WOKE UP EARLY, SO...
!
SO HOW ABOUT YOU ASK GRANDPA IF HE'D LIKE TO JOIN US?
I ACCIDENTALLY MADE YOUR DADDY'S BREAKFAST, TOO...
HEY, MIYA!
GWAMPA, JOIN US!
AND SO, THERE WAS ONE MORE MEMBER IN THE HINAMI FAMILY!
UH...
ARE YOU JUST GONNA LEAVE ME OUT?!
HEY!

END OF CHAPTER 9

WONDER!

CHAPTER 10

JUMP!
WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING ?!
UH...
THAT...
AHHH!
THAT ISN'T KOTA!

HEY! W-WAIT!
BOOK
HEY, YOU!
ACK!
SHOVE!
ARE YOU OKAY?
.....
!
ARF!
CHATTER
CHATTER

OH...
WEWCUM HOME, DADDY!
HERE'S A PRESENT FOR YOU, MIYA!
MIYA, YOUR DADDY'S BACK HOME!
WELCOME HOME!
DID YOUR BUSINESS TRIP GO WELL ?
DID YOU SORT THINGS OUT WITH YOUR STEP FATHER ?
DO PEOPLE NORMALLY BUY GIFTS AFTER A ONE-NIGHT BUSINESS TRIP?!
YOU COULD'VE BOUGHT THAT THING ANYWHERE!
IT TURNED OUT IT WAS ALL THAT OLD BAG'S MISUNDER-STANDING!
YAWN!
LUCKY YOU, MIYA!
きゃ SQUEAL!
ISH A DOGGY!!

WHAT? YOU DON'T SEE THEM WHEN YOU MAKE YOUR ANNUAL VISIT TO KOTA'S MOTHER'S GRAVE?
WELL... EVEN IF WE GO, IT'S EVERYONE FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE FAMILY, RIGHT?
WAIT, DEAR! IT'S HOT!
HUFF HUFF
GIMME!
YOUR BROTHER'S SON, KAITO RAN AWAY FROM HOME... HE'S THE SAME AGE AS KOTA, RIGHT? THIRD YEAR IN HIGH SCHOOL?
THE LAST TIME WE SAW HIM WAS IN JUNIOR HIGH, RIGHT?
BUBBLE
BUBBLE
BUBBLE
MY OLDER BROTHER ?!
HE CALLED ?
...SO THAT BOY THAT I RAN INTO IN FRONT OF THE STATION... HE MUST'VE BEEN KAITO.
SO, IN SHORT, YOU JUST DIDN'T GO?!
HOO!
WE COULD NEVER TAKE A DAY OFF TOGETHER, AND AFTER MIYA WAS BORN, WE NEVER REALLY GOT A CHANCE TO GO ANYWHERE FAR...
AND KOTA HAD HIS BASKETBALL GAMES, TOO
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, IKUMI DID SAY SHE MISTOOK SOMEONE ELSE FOR ME!
.....
WHAT? SO DOES THAT MEAN THAT BOY HAS BEEN HANGING AROUND HERE?

24
HELLO!
.....
SNATCH

!!
SMACK!
GUESS WHOOO?!
L-LET GO OF ME! WHO ARE YOU?!
CHOKE HOLD!♡
HINAMI, WHATCHA DOIN' SKIPPING OUT ON WORK, HUH?!
HEY! ARE YOU SURE YOU HAVE HINAMI THERE?
FOR HINAMI, ISN'T THAT GUY A BIT SMALL?
HUH ?!
STRUGGLE!
EWWW! NO WAY! WHO IS THIS?!
GROSS!
I'D LIKE TO ASK THE SAME QUESTION MYSELF!!!

SNACK
アイ
OH, KOTA!
IT'S YOUR FRIENDS FROM SCHOOL.
HEY, SAWAKI!
RELATIVE?
HE SAID HE WAS YOUR COUSIN OR SOMETHING.
HE WAS ALL SHAKEN UP AND SAYING RANDOM THINGS, BUT HE WAS SO SIMILAR TO YOU IT WAS UNCANNY!
HE WAS TRYING TO STEAL SOMETHING FROM THE CONVENIENCE STORE, YOU KNOW?
SERIOUS!
.....
COULD IT BE KAITO ...?

.....
SO SIMILAR!
SNIFF
SNIFF
ゆく
ゆく
EXCITED!
URGH! AND WONDER TOOK HIS CHAIN OFF BY HIMSELF AGAIN!
HEY, MIYA! IT'S TIME FOR YOU TO GO TO BED!
STOMP!
STOMP!
GIGGLE!
LEFTOVER SUKIYAKI
AND SO...
SHE LET ME GET OFF WORK EARLY TO BRING HIM HERE FOR NOW...
WELL, GOOD THING WE FOUND HIM!
WE SHOULD SAY THANKS TO IKUMI AND THE OTHERS!
BEEP
WAS THAT YOUR OLDER BROTHER?
!

HE'S WORRIED ...
MY OLD MAN... IS HE REALLY PISSED ?
HUH?
...!
YEAH...
SIGH.
HE'S GOT THAT RIGHT! MY STUDENT RANKING FELL WAY DOWN, TOO!
AND HE THINKS YOU LEFT HOME BECAUSE HE SCOLDED YOU ABOUT IT...
HE SAID YOUR MARKS DROPPED AFTER SUMMER BREAK...
I FEEL A CRAZY AMOUNT OF PRESSURE, YOU KNOW?!
THEY'VE BOTH GONE TO PRIVATE AND STATE COLLEGES...
YOU KNOW HOW MY TWO OLDER SISTERS ARE REALLY SMART?!
AND THAT'S WHY, ME BEING THE FIRST SON, THERE'S A LOT OF EXPECTATIONS RIDING ON ME!

C'MON! IT'S NOT LIKE THEY WERE GONNA MAKE THAT MUCH OFF THE BOOK I TOOK, ANYWAY!
CRASH!
...SO YOU CHOSE TO STEAL ?!
AND I LEARNED A LOT OUT OF IT!
AND SO, I GAVE UP CARING ABOUT THE ENTRANCE EXAMS, AND I JUST LEFT HOME.
I DIDN'T HAVE YOUR ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER, AND I WAS RUNNING OUT OF CASH...
SH... SHOP LIFTING ?!
TAIYO ?!
.....
SWEET! THANKS A LOT, YOU GUYS!
WHAT?! REALLY ?!
NO...
...DID YOU TELL MY OLD MAN ABOUT THE SHOP-LIFTING?
I ASKED HIM TO LET YOU STAY HERE UNTIL YOU GOT YOUR HEAD SORTED OUT.

THANKS, AUNT!
USE THIS IF YOU GET COLD...
WOW! SO YOU HAVE A SEPARATE STUDY ROOM HERE, KOTA?
IT'S SMALL, BUT NICE!
.....
I THINK HE JUST STARTED ACTING OUT BECAUSE OF HIS SCHOOL PROBLEMS.
WELL, I DON'T THINK HE'S A BAD KID...
WOULDN'T IT BE BETTER IF YOU TOLD THE TRUTH TO YOUR OLDER BROTHER ?
HIS FACE AND HIS VOICE IS EXACTLY THE SAME AS KOTA...
THANKS, AUNT!
BUT HIS PERSONALITY IS THE EXACT OPPOSITE...
AND PLUS, KAITO JUST MIGHT HELP KOTA START THINKING ABOUT GOING TO COLLEGE HIMSELF!
THAT'S SOME WISHFUL THINKING!

WHAT? YOU'RE NOT GOING TO COLLEGE?
WHAT? YOU HAVE A PART-TIME JOB?
BESIDES, I CAN PRETTY MUCH COVER THE COST OF THE ENTRANCE EXAM WITH MY PART-TIME JOB.
I GUESS IT MAKES SENSE... SINCE YOUR RELATIVES HAD TO TAKE YOU IN, THEY MUST NOT CARE ALL THAT MUCH.
I TOOK A BUNCH OF CASH FROM MY PARENTS WHEN I RAN AWAY...
MAYBE I SHOULD TAKE ON A PART-TIME JOB, TOO.
BUT I BLEW IT ALL IN ONE NIGHT AT THE ARCADES.
IT'S BECAUSE I WANT TO DO SOMETHING ELSE AT VOCATIONAL SCHOOL THAT I'M NOT GOING.
SCRAM, YOU MANGY MUTT! GOD, I HATE DOGS!!
TO BE HONEST, I FEEL REALLY LUCKY THAT I WAS FOUND AND BROUGHT OVER HERE...
SNIFF SNIFF

GOOD MORNING, WONDER!
ARF!
WHAT'S WRONG, BOY?
C'MON! LET'S GO FOR YOUR WALK!
.....
.....

OOH!
!
RATTLE!
KOTI SHIMAOKA
HM ...?
KOTA'S FATHER ...
AH...
SHIMAOKA ...?
COULD IT BE THAT MAN WHO CHEATED ON KOTA'S MOTHER?
MY OLD MAN AND UNCLE WERE TALKING ABOUT IT BEFORE.

THIS IS THE FORM OF RECOMM-ENDATION...
ALSO, WRITE YOUR GUARDIAN'S NAME ON THE APPLICATION FORM...
AND YOU KNOW THE APPLICATION DEADLINE, AM I RIGHT?
YES, SIR.
HINAMI, WITH YOUR GRADES, IF YOU JUST WORK AT IT A BIT MORE, THE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMS SHOULDN'T BE A PROBLEM...
IS THAT APPLICATION TO GET ON THE RECOMMENDED LIST FOR COLLEGES ?!
THANKS FOR EVERYTHING, SIR!

NOTHING CAN BE DONE, IKUMI. HE WANTS TO GO TO SCHOOL FOR NURSERY TEACHERS, SO...
I TALKED TO THE TEACHER, AND HE SAID HE'D ORDER THE MATERIALS FOR ME...
THERE, THERE.
WOULDN'T YOU CALL THAT A "TRAITOR"?
EXCEPT HE DIDN'T BETRAY ANYONE, EITHER
WHAAAAT?!
FINE! THEN I'M GOING THERE, TOO!
YOU SAID WE'D GO TOGETHER TO VOCATIONAL SCHOOL!
YOU DIRTY CHEATER!
WHAT'S GOING ON?!
AH!
THE SCHOOL RULES SAY SMOKING AND HAIR-DYING ARE STRICTLY PROHIBITED...
OH, SHADDUP! I'VE MADE UP MY MIND!
IT'S A BAD IDEA! IF YOU GO, ALL THE KIDS ARE GONNA TURN INTO THUGS!!
YOU?! A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER?!
I DON'T SEE IT!
OH
IS THAT WHAT YOU BASE YOUR DECISION ON?!
HEH! HEH!
AH WELL, I GUESS BECOMING A HAIR STYLIST IS THE THING FOR ME!

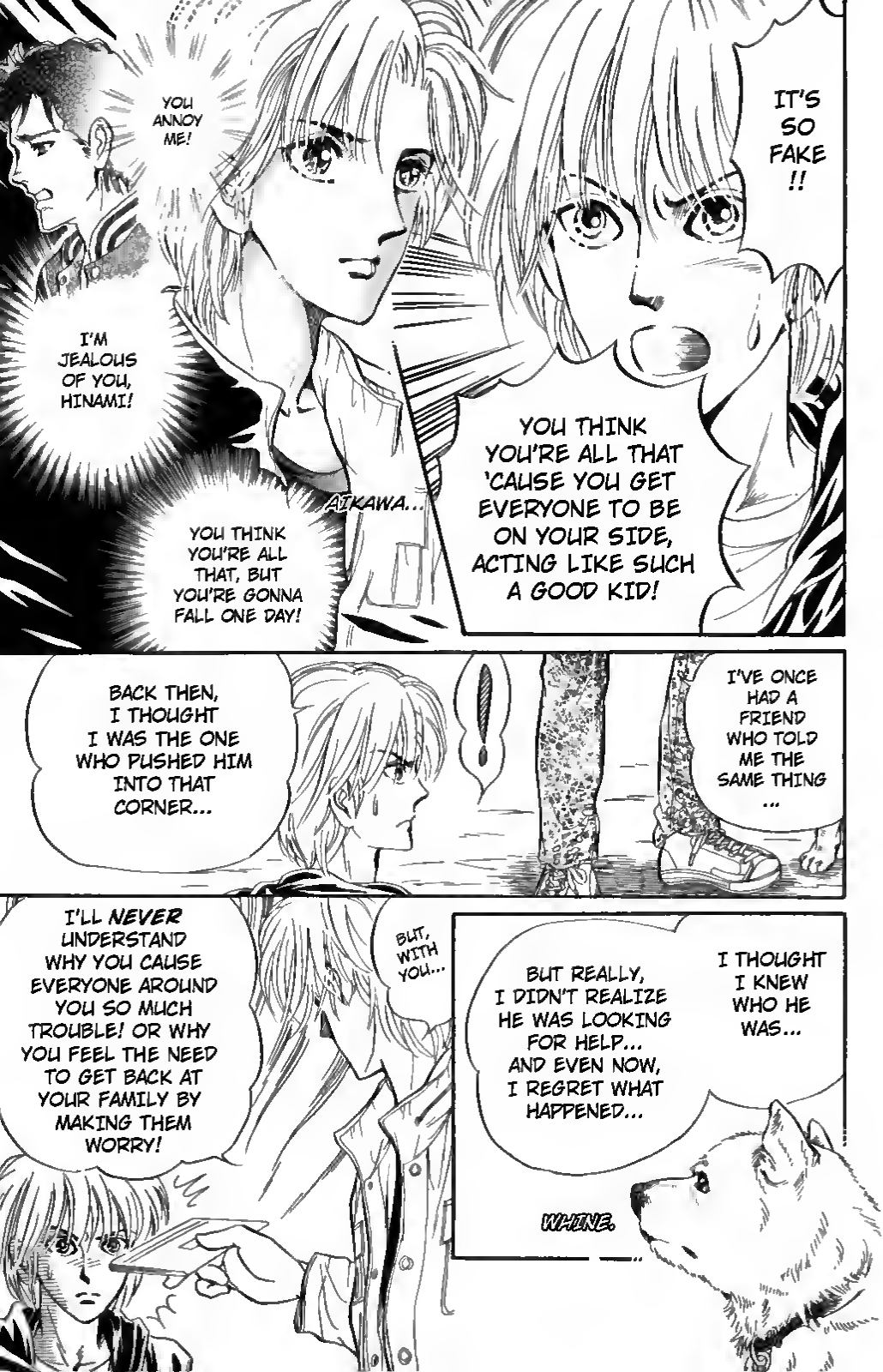
SORRY FOR ALL THE TROUBLE! I REALLY APPRECIATE THIS!
SHIMAOKA
YES... OKAY... SO WE'LL DO THAT...
THANKS ... DAD...
SURPRISE!
BEEP

EEP!
GRARR!
WHA... WHAT DO YOU WANT?
AH... MY NAME'S KAITO.
IT'S THAT NEPHEW OF TAIYO'S...
THAT ISN'T KOTA, DEAR!
OH?
HUH? KOTA? YOU'RE BACK HOME ALREADY? YOU'RE EARLY!
THUD
THUD
WELL, NOW! YOU LOOK A LOT LIKE KOTA, SO I GOT CONFUSED!
WE BOUGHT JAM CAKES. CARE TO JOIN US?
HAHAHA!
UH, ER... WELL, I HAVE SOMETHING TO DO, SO...

I DON'T KNOW EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED ...
BUT IT WAS A SHAMEFUL THING WHAT YOU DID! YOU DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT TELLING YOUR FAMILY!
TRICKLE
TRICKLE
UHH...
BECAUSE THERE ARE SELFISH CHILDREN WHO DON'T HAVE PARENTS LIKE YOU DO!
KOTA, ON THE OTHER HAND... HE WORKS VERY HARD!
TALKING WITH KOTA, I ALSO REALIZED WHAT A GOOD PERSON HE IS, AND I WANT TO MODEL MYSELF AFTER HIM...
I'VE BEEN TAKING A REALLY GOOD LOOK AT MY LIFE ...
AND I DO FEEL TRULY SORRY FOR WHAT I DID TO MY PARENTS.
I'M GONNA APOLOGIZE TO THEM WHEN I GO BACK HOME.
ANYWAY, THANK YOU FOR THE CAKES.
WHAT'S UP WITH HIM?
RATTLE

JOLT!
どき
UH... UHHH...
HEY, DID YOU GO TO GRANDMA'S PLACE?
HMPH!
.....
STARE...
YEAH. I'M GONNA GO PICK UP MIYA RIGHT NOW!
OH! YOU'RE BACK!
WHOA!
HEY! WHAT ARE YOU-
DASH
OW!
WONDER?!
THUD!

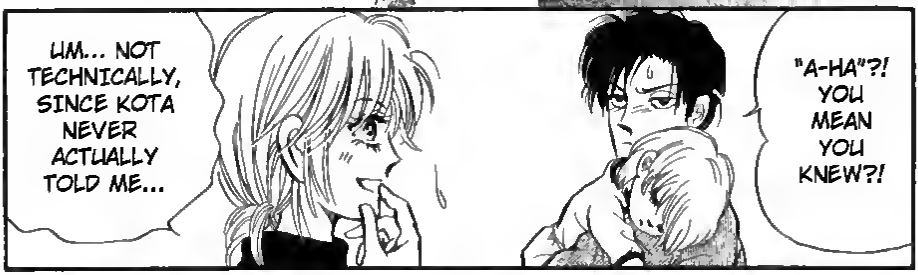
!!
I WAS... I WAS JUST GONNA P-PLAY A JOKE ON... YOU... HEH!
HEH HEH!
THAT DOG... HE'S... UH... HE SURE IS SMART!
YOU CAN'T HIDE ANYTHING FROM WONDER...
DON'T ACT ALL CALM AND RIGHTEOUS WITH ALL THE MONEY YOU'VE SAVED UP!
WHAT'S UP WITH YOU ?!
T... TELLING ME THAT YOU PUT YOURSELF THROUGH SCHOOL AND ALL THAT.....


YOU ANNOY ME!
I'M JEALOUS OF YOU, HINAMI!
YOU THINK YOU'RE ALL THAT, BUT YOU'RE GONNA FALL ONE DAY!
AIKAWA...
IT'S SO FAKE !!
YOU THINK YOU'RE ALL THAT 'CAUSE YOU GET EVERYONE TO BE ON YOUR SIDE, ACTING LIKE SUCH A GOOD KID!
BACK THEN, I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONE WHO PUSHED HIM INTO THAT CORNER...
I'VE ONCE HAD A FRIEND WHO TOLD ME THE SAME THING ...
I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY YOU CAUSE EVERYONE AROUND YOU SO MUCH TROUBLE! OR WHY YOU FEEL THE NEED TO GET BACK AT YOUR FAMILY BY MAKING THEM WORRY!
BUT, WITH YOU...
BUT REALLY, I DIDN'T REALIZE HE WAS LOOKING FOR HELP... AND EVEN NOW, I REGRET WHAT HAPPENED...
I THOUGHT I KNEW WHO HE WAS...
WHINE.

I WAS ORIGINALLY GONNA USE THAT MONEY FOR SCHOOL...
BUT... IF YOU PROMISE NOT TO STEAL FROM SOMEONE ELSE...
THEN I DON'T CARE HOW MUCH MONEY YOU TAKE FROM THERE...
BUT WHILE YOU'RE AT IT...
.....
TAKE MY BANK STAMP AND TRAIN FARE FOR GOING BACK HOME.
I'LL TELL TAIYO AND KAORI.
DON'T TOY WITH THE PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT YOU ANYMORE.
LET'S GO, WONDER.
WOOF!

KOTA!
ダッ
BOLT!
WEWCUM HOME, DADDY!
HE'S AT WORK.
OH, YOU'RE STILL AWAKE, MIYA! ♡
AND KAITO APPARENTLY WENT BACK HOME.
OH! THAT'S GOOD!
STAYING UP LATE IS NOT GOOD, HUNNY!
HAHAHAHA!
DID YOU NEED KOTA OR SOMETHING?
YEAH, THAT'S RIGHT!
DASH WITE !
THAT KOTA... HE DECIDED ON GOING TO COLLEGE WITHOUT EVEN TELLING US!

A-HA!
保育士
NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER
COLLEGE ...


UM... NOT TECHNICALLY, SINCE KOTA NEVER ACTUALLY TOLD ME...
"A-HA"?! YOU MEAN YOU KNEW?!

WHILE I WAS AT WORK, I GOT A CALL FROM MR. SHIMAOKA ...
KOTA'S... FATHER ?
DOES THAT MEAN HE DOESN'T TRUST HIS UNCLE?!
SO I WAS THE ONLY ONE WHO DIDN'T KNOW?!
GLOOM
ER...
WHY IS *THAT* YOUR CONCLUSION ?!

FOR MR. SHIMAOKA, HE STILL WANTED TO DO IT AS A FATHER, BUT KOTA KEPT REFUSING 'TIL THE VERY END.
HE SAID HE WAS NEVER HAPPIER TO HAVE HIS OWN SON, KOTA, ASKING HIM TO SUPPORT WITH HIS SCHOOL FEES.
HUH...?
KOTA GAVE HIM HIS ACCOUNT NUMBER AND ASKED HIM TO SEND HIM MONEY FOR HIS ADMISSION COSTS.
BUT THEN HE CALLED RIGHT AFTER AND, FOR SOME REASON, TOOK BACK EVERYTHING HE SAID...
HOLD ON! ARE YOU SURE THAT IT WAS KOTA WHO MADE THAT CALL?
THAT WASN'T ME...
HE SAID HE WAS DEEPLY MOVED WHEN KOTA SAID "THANK YOU, DAD"
MR. SHIMAOKA CALLED ME IN CASE I FOUND OUT AFTERWARD AND GOT UPSET.
BUT THEN, KOTA SENT BACK THE SAME AMOUNT MR. SHIMAOKA HAD SENT HIM...
BUT I DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE THAT KOTA WAS GOING TO COLLEGE, EVEN THOUGH I LIVE WITH HIM!

KOTA.
I WAS PLANNING ON GIVING MY BANK BOOK TO KAITO...
BUT IT TURNS OUT HE DIDN'T TAKE IT WITH HIM..
THAT WAS... K-KAITO ?!
WHY, OF COURSE...
KAITO'S VOICE SOUNDS SIMILAR TO KOTA'S, SO MR. SHIMAOKA DIDN'T HAVE A CLUE!
I WANTED TO MAKE SURE THAT I WAS GOING TO VOCATIONAL SCHOOL BEFORE DISCUSSING THINGS WITH THE TWO OF YOU.
VOCATIONAL SCHOOL?
SO NOT COLLEGE?
WELL, I THINK I WANT TO BECOME A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER...
TTRRR

SO KAITO ARRIVED HOME SAFELY, THEN?
OH...
TAIYO'S OLDER BROTHER!
NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER

WHAT?!
KAITO'S GONNA TRY TO TAKE THE ENTRANCE EXAM FOR A COLLEGE HERE?!

NOT AT ALL!
DON'T BE SILLY! WE DIDN'T REALLY DO MUCH!
...HUH?

I GUESS THINGS TURNED OUT ALRIGHT!
THAT'S A RELIEF!
YOUR OLDER BROTHER SEEMED QUITE HAPPY THAT KAITO FINALLY HAS A GOAL FOR THE ENTRANCE EXAMS.
AND I GUESS IT WAS KAITO WHO WAS INFLUENCED BY KOTA?
!
IT'S KAITO!
HE SAID HE WANTS TO SPEAK WITH YOU!
.....
AND THEN, WHEN I THOUGHT ABOUT YOU GIVING ME THAT LOOK AGAIN, AS IF YOU'D GIVEN UP ON ME...
BUT I THOUGHT ABOUT IT... AND I FELT LIKE I'D GET CAUGHT RIGHT AWAY...
I FELT ANGRY INSIDE AND JUST STOPPED.
TO BE HONEST, I WAS PLANNING ON TRICKING THAT MAN YOU CALL DAD TO GET MONEY FROM HIM!
ピッ
KA-CHING...
WHEN I CALLED HIM, HE WAS SO DUMB HE DIDN'T EVEN SUSPECT!

IN ANY CASE, I'M GONNA STUDY REALLY HARD AND NEXT YEAR, I'M DEFINITELLY GONNA GET INTO A COLLEGE IN YOUR PART OF TOWN!
I LOOK FORWARD TO THEN!
JUST KNOW THAT I'M GONNA PAY YOU BACK FOR MAKING ME THE IDIOT THIS TIME!
.....
KOTA ...?
VOCATIONAL SCHOOL? A MALE NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER?
!!!

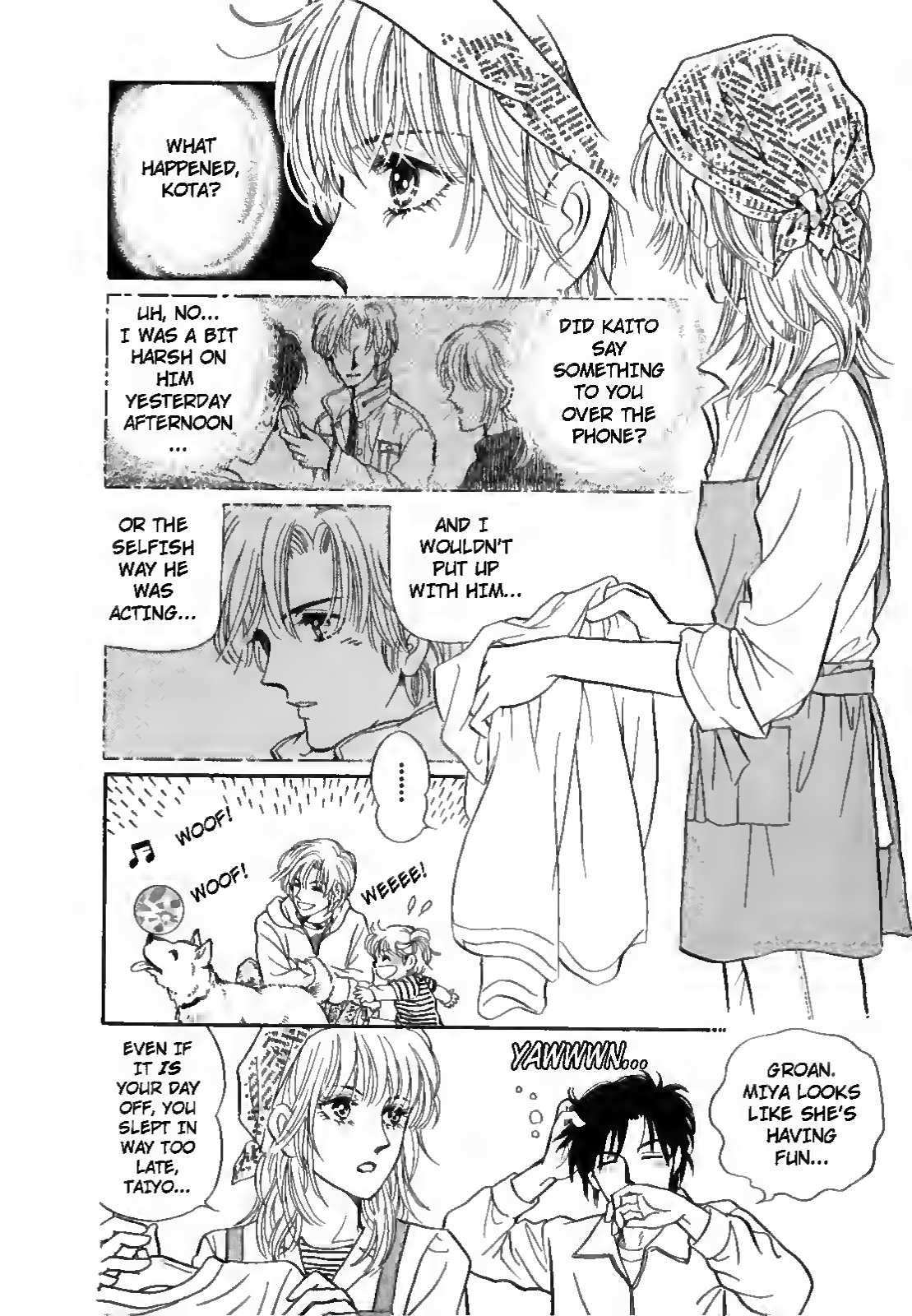
END OF CHAPTER 10

WONDER!

CHAPTER 11

ZOOM...
ピ...
WHOOSH...
ピピッ
ZOOM...
ピピッ
ZOOM...

HERE IT COMES!
OOOH!
BOING
HEWW IT COMES, WANDA!!
PONG!
WOOF!
HYA!
NOT WIKE DAAAT! YOO HAFTO KYATCH IT, WANDA!
HAHAHAHAHA!


WHAT HAPPENED, KOTA?
UH, NO... I WAS A BIT HARSH ON HIM YESTERDAY AFTERNOON ...
DID KAITO SAY SOMETHING TO YOU OVER THE PHONE?
OR THE SELFISH WAY HE WAS ACTING...
AND I WOULDN'T PUT UP WITH HIM...
.....
WOOF!
WOOF!
WEEEE!
EVEN IF IT IS YOUR DAY OFF, YOU SLEPT IN WAY TOO LATE, TAIYO...
YAWWWN...
GROAN. MIYA LOOKS LIKE SHE'S HAVING FUN...

HE SAID IT HIMSELF AFTER THE PHONE CALL WITH KAITO, DIDN'T HE?
"THAT KINDA THING"?
KYAHAHAHA
HOW HE THOUGHT HE MIGHT'VE GONE TOO FAR WITH WHAT HE SAID TO KAITO...
.....I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT KINDA THING IS ON KOTA'S MIND...
...OR MAYBE ...
...I GUESS ...
"GOING TOO FAR" SOUNDS MORE LIKE MY MOTHER THAN KOTA!
HM?
I DON'T THINK SO.
DIDN'T YOU HEAR HIS REASON FOR BECOMING A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER?
IN A WAY, HE'S BEEN SO CAREFUL WITH WHAT HE TELLS US, EVEN, DON'T YOU THINK?

ALSO... IN THAT NURSERY SCHOOL EVENT THAT I WENT TO FOR MIYA IN TAIYO'S PLACE,
THERE WERE MALE TEACHERS FROM OTHER NURSERY SCHOOLS.
BUT I REALLY LIKE WORKING WITH KIDS...
I ONLY REALIZED IT WHEN TAIYO TOLD BROUGHT IT UP...
AND THEY WERE ABLE TO PLAY FOR THEIR KIDS WITH ALL THEIR STRENGTH.
THE YOUNG FATHERS WERE CASUALLY TALKING WITH THEM...
...I CLEARLY REMEMBER PLAYING BALL WITH TAIYO WHEN I FIRST CAME TO THIS HOUSE...
SO I THOUGHT, "WOULDN'T IT BE NICE TO LET THOSE KIDS WHO DON'T HAVE FATHERS EXPERIENCE THAT SAME JOY?"
I WANT TO BE THAT PERSON TO SOMEONE ELSE...
EVEN THOUGH HE DIDN'T TELL ME WHAT HE WAS DOING AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?
TAIYO, THAT MEANS YOU MORE THAN FILLED THE SHOES OF KOTA'S FATHER.
IT JUST MEANS YOU RAISED HIM TO BECOME THAT RELIABLE A PERSON!

BUT, KNOW THIS, KOTA...
YOU HAVE A FAMILY HERE WHO WILL ALWAYS TRUST AND WATCH OUT FOR YOU...
ME BEING THEIR FIRST SON, THERE'S A LOT OF EXPECT-ATIONS ...
I FEEL A CRAZY AMOUNT OF PRESSURE!
STILL...
BECAUSE HIS COUSIN, WHO IS ABOUT HIS AGE, SPOKE SO RECKLESSLY.
IT MUST'VE BROUGHT UP PAIN THAT KOTA HAD PUSHED DEEP DOWN.
MOMMY!
THERE'S NO NEED FOR YOU TO LIVE THINKING YOU OWE US ANYTHING...
HINAMI, WHEN DID YOU SAY YOU HAD YOUR INTERVIEW?
IT'S SUCH A NICE DAY OUTSIDE! DAMMIT!
MAN... THESE CLASSES ARE SUCH A WASTE OF TIME. HOW 'BOUT WE SKIP THE AFTERNOON AND GO SOMEWHERE?

REALLY? WHY?
I DON'T THINK IT'S GONNA BE THAT SIMPLE.
I SENT MY APPLICATION LATE, SO I ENDED UP ON THE SECONDARY APPLICATION LIST...
NEXT WEEK SATURDAY.
OOOH...
STILL... IT'S NOT LIKE A WRITTEN EXAM, RIGHT?
YOU'RE A SHOO-IN IF IT'S JUST AN INTERVIEW.
WELL, IF IT DOESN'T WORK OUT, I CAN ALWAYS TAKE THE ENTRANCE EXAM NEXT YEAR LIKE NORMAL.
SINCE THIS IS A JOB THAT IS INTENDED FOR WOMEN, IT'S A LOT HARDER FOR MALE STUDENTS ON THE SECONDARY LIST TO PASS, COMPARED TO THOSE ON THE PRIMARY LIST.
SHUT UP!
BAHAHAHA!
YOU SHOULD TAKE MIYA TO THE INTERVIEW WITH YOU!
THAT MEANS YOU REALLY GOTTA STAND OUT IN THE INTERVIEW, RIGHT?
HAHA!
THAT'D BE AWESOME! THAT'S STANDING OUT FOR SURE!
MUST BE NICE FOR THOSE IDIOTS WHO AREN'T GOING ANYWHERE AFTER HIGH SCHOOL!
HAHA!
HAHA!

WHAT?
YOU WANNA SAY SOMETHIN' TO OUR FACES, YOU NERDS?!
UHH... N-NOTHING! NOTHING AT ALL!
WE WERE BEING TOO LOUD, GUYS.
WHISPER
THAT'S S-SAWAKI'S GROUP, YOU IDIOT!!
ERM...
AHH... N-NO...
SORRY FOR INTERRUPTING YOUR STUDIES...
...WHY DOES HINAMI HANG OUT WITH THOSE THUGS?
AND HIS GRADES AREN'T BAD, EITHER. YET HE ISN'T GOING TO COLLEGE.
I DON'T GET THAT GUY...
HE SAID HE'S GOING TO VOCATIONAL SCHOOL IN ORDER TO BECOME A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER.
WHO STUDIES DURIN' THEIR BREAK TIME?!
LET'S JUST GO TO THE HALLS!

WHAT?! NURSERY SCHOOL ?!
UGH! THAT GUY'S WEIRD!
WHISPER
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, EVEN THOUGH HE'S POPULAR WITH THE GIRLS IN BASKETBALL GAMES, HE DOESN'T HAVE A GIRLFRIEND!
WHISPER
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT! SO... HE'S INTO *THAT* SORTA THING...
N-NOTHING! WE'VE JUST BEEN HEARING ABOUT INCIDENTS INVOLVING CHILDREN...
HAHAHA!
UH... NOT THAT IT SAYS ANYTHING ABOUT YOU, HINAMI...
YIKES!
INTO WHAT SORTA THING ?
OF COURSE IT DOESN'T!
WHAT THE HECK ARE ALL OF YOU THINKING, HUH?!?!
IT WAS JUST SMALL TALK, THAT'S ALL!!
AHHHH!
YOU BOYS ARE THE WORST KIND OF IDIOTS!

HOW ABOUT YOUR WATCH?
KOTA, YOU DIDN'T FORGET ANYTHING?
DO YOU HAVE ENOUGH FOR THE TRAIN?
YUP! I'M GOOD!
OKAY, OKAY!
YOU... YOU SURE? JUST B-BE YOURSELF, OKAY?! THAT'S ALL! DON'T BE NERVOUS! TAKE GOOD CARE OF YOURSELF! AND STAY RELAXED! AND CALM! OKAY?
TAIYO, YOU STAY "RELAXED AND CALM"...
IT'S OKAY... I'M NOT A CHILD...
UHHH... I SHOULD GO WITH YOU, SHOULDN'T I?!
DO YOU REALLY KNOW HOW TO GET TO THE SCHOOL?
ばた
じた
NERVOUS!

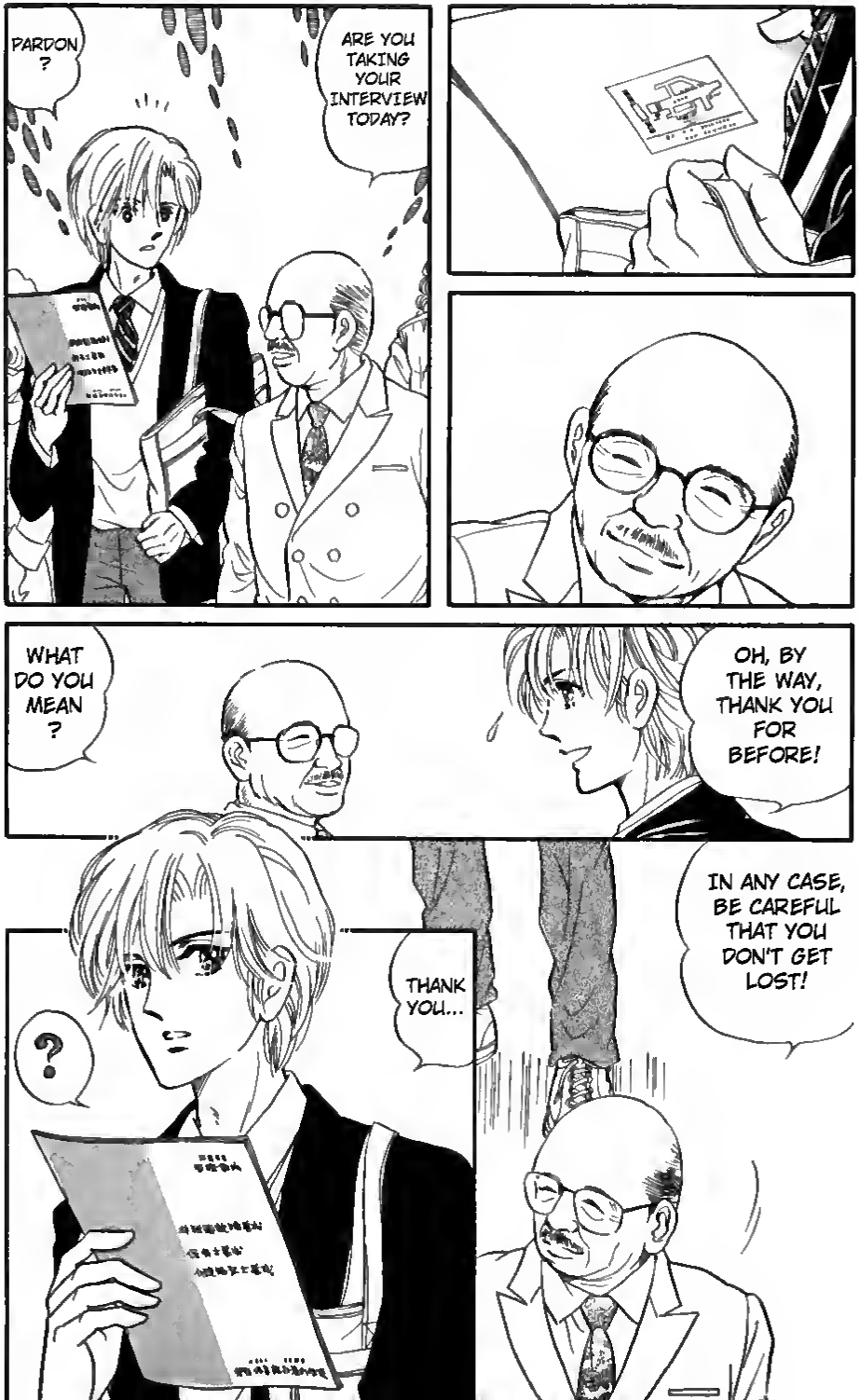
BE KEAFOO, KOTA!
THANKS, MIYA!
THERE'S NO SCHOOL TODAY, IS THERE?
IT'S NOT EVEN 8 YET.
IT'S THE INTERVIEW FOR HIS VOCATIONAL SCHOOL.
APPARENTLY THERE ARE 3 GROUPS OF APPLICANTS, SPLIT INTO SEPARATE TIMES. APPLICANTS GATHER IN THEIR GROUP FOR THE INTERVIEW.
THEY SAID I NEED TO GET THERE BY 9:30.
ARF!
ARF!
IN THAT CASE, TAKE THIS.
OH?
IT'S MY LUCKY CHARM.
GOOD LUCK!!
THANKS!
THE WHOLE FAMILY'S OUT HERE!
GOOD WOK!
ARF!
WHAT WAS THE CHARM FOR?
FOR GOOD HEALTH AND SAFETY ON THE ROAD.
COME PLAY WITH YOUR GRANNY, OKAY?
ANXIOUS!

ZWOOM!
IT'S QUITE CROWDED EVEN ON SATURDAY MORNINGS.
RUMBLE!
FALL
THUD!
I'LL GET THERE AROUND 9...
IT TAKES ABOUT 10 MINUTES WALKING FROM THE STATION TO THE SCHOOL...
WHOA!
AHH!
ARE YOU ALRIGHT?
UHH... SORRY ABOUT THAT! THANK YOU!

UH, EXCUSE ME?
HUH ?
ガタン
GACHUNK
GACHUNK
ガタン
CAN YOU GIVE UP ONE OF THE SEATS?
WHAAA?
ガタン
GACHUNK
ガタン
GACHUNK

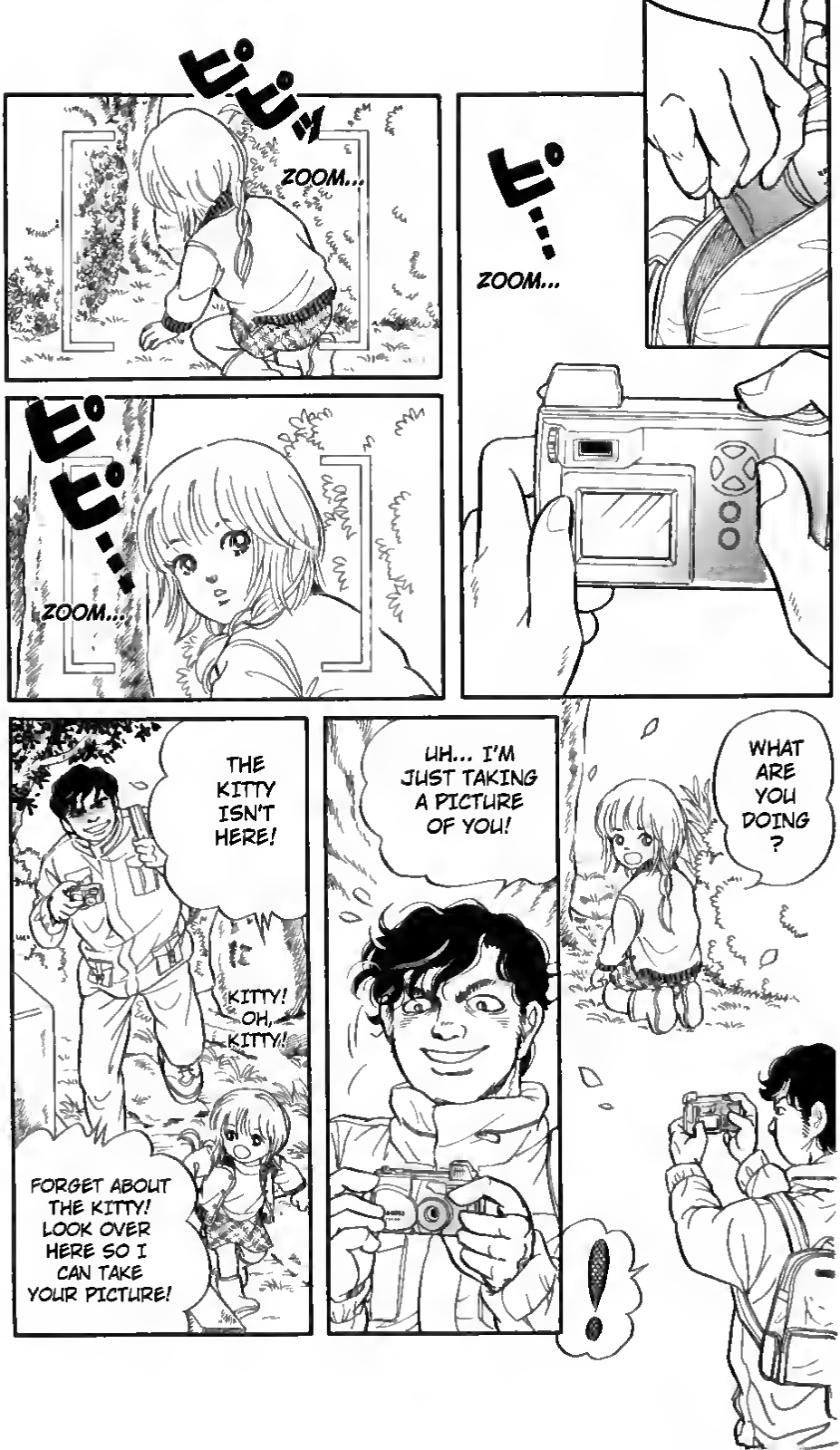
GLARE
.....
IF YOU JUST MOVE A LITTLE, ONE MORE PERSON WILL BE ABLE TO SIT DOWN...
PLEASE.
GRR...
WHY, YOU, LITTLE~
NO!!
ネン!
BANG!
OH, MY! QUITE SHAKY, THIS TRAIN, ISN'T IT?

HMPH!
HEH HEH... SORRY ABOUT THAT!
WOULD YOU LIKE TO SIT DOWN, MA'AM? THE YOUNG MAN HAS GIVEN UP HIS SEAT!
I'M ACTUALLY GETTING OFF AT THE NEXT STOP, SO...
HAHAHA!
OH! ARE YOU?
OH...
PSSSH...
I GET OFF HERE ...
HMM... I GET OFF AT EXIT... A2 ?


PARDON ?
ARE YOU TAKING YOUR INTERVIEW TODAY?
WHAT DO YOU MEAN ?
OH, BY THE WAY, THANK YOU FOR BEFORE!
IN ANY CASE, BE CAREFUL THAT YOU DON'T GET LOST!
THANK YOU...
?

...I WONDER IF I'M GOING THE RIGHT WAY...
HEY... THAT'S THE MAN FROM BEFORE...!
HE GOT OFF AT THE SAME STATION AS ME?!
...!

SO WHERE'S THE LITTLE KITTY?!
HUSH! IF YOU'RE TOO LOUD, IT'LL RUN AWAY!
IT MIGHT BE HIDING OVER THERE!
TRY LOOKING FOR IT!
OVER THERE ?
OH, KITTY!


ピピッ
ZOOM...
ピ...
ZOOM...
ピピ...
ZOOM...
WHAT ARE YOU DOING ?
UH... I'M JUST TAKING A PICTURE OF YOU!
!
THE KITTY ISN'T HERE!
KITTY! OH, KITTY!
FORGET ABOUT THE KITTY! LOOK OVER HERE SO I CAN TAKE YOUR PICTURE!

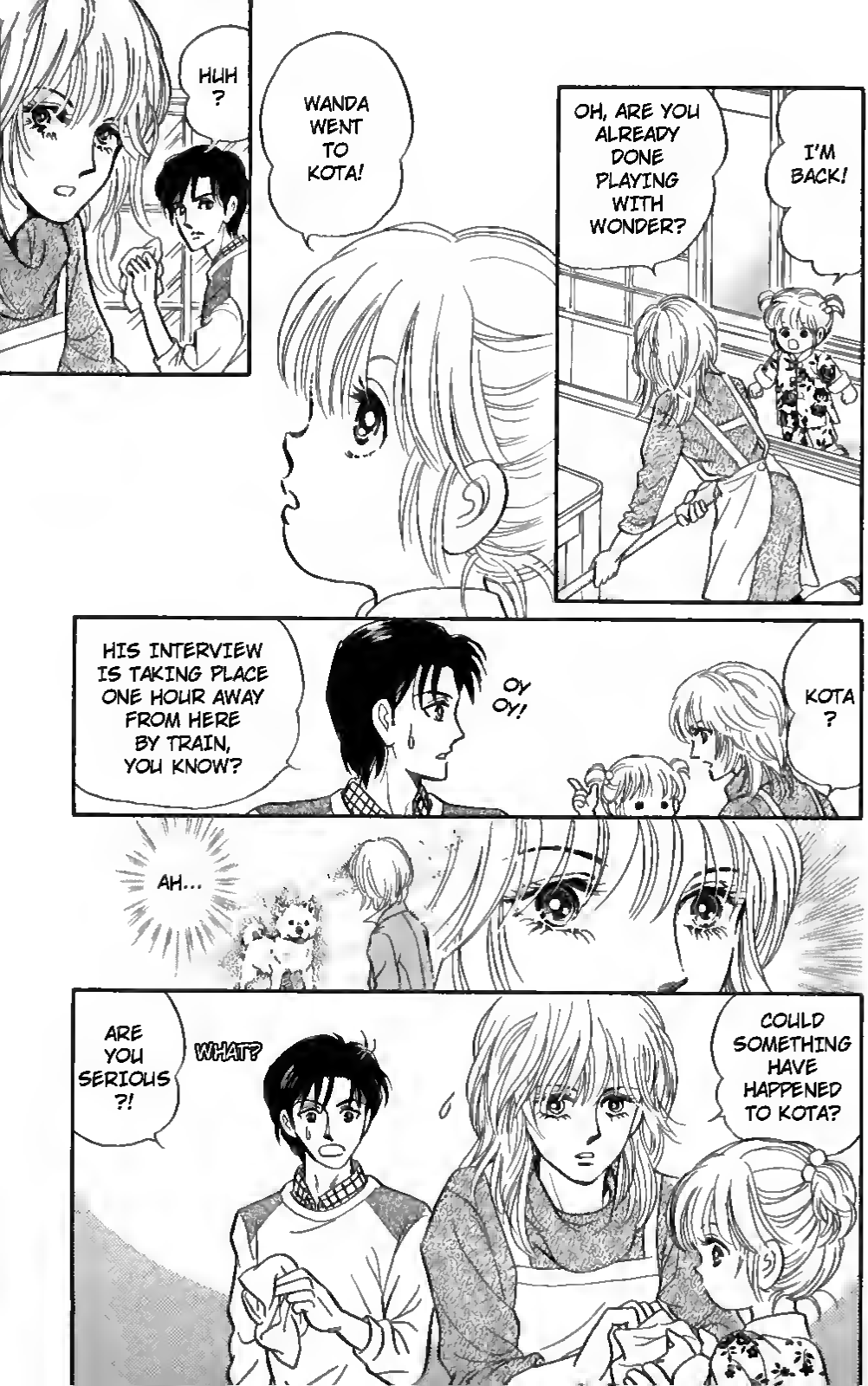
AHHHHH!
!
NOOO! KITTYYY!
I JUST SAID I'M TAKING YOUR PICTURE!
BE QUIET!
WAHHH!!
IF YOU DON'T BE QUIET, I'M GONNA HIT YOU!
THE KITTY WAS NEVER THERE!!

WONDER!

DON'T GET IN THE WAY, YOU IDIOT!
YOU'RE NOT INVOLVED IN THIS!
COME HERE!
YES!
CAN YOU GO HOME BY YOURSELF ?
DAMMIT! WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM ?!?!
パタパタ
PATTER
PATTER
OKAY, THEN! GO TO YOUR MOMMY!
.....
BE CAREFUL ON YOUR WAY THERE!

YOU JUST KEEP GETTING IN THE WAY...
SHWING!
WELL, I WAS HOLDING BACK BEFORE BECAUSE OF ALL THOSE PEOPLE, BUT NOT NOW!
DON'T DO ANYTHING STUPID! OKAY?
I'LL SHOW YOU WHO'S THE STUPID ONE!!
DON'T YOU ORDER ME AROUND!!

JOLT
WHAT'S WONG, WANDA?

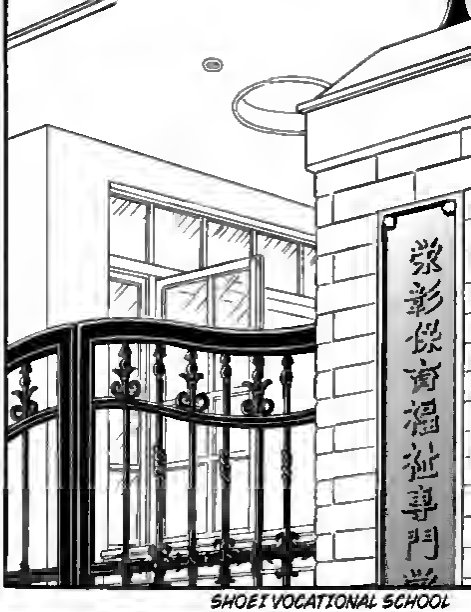

HUH ?
WANDA WENT TO KOTA!
OH, ARE YOU ALREADY DONE PLAYING WITH WONDER?
I'M BACK!
HIS INTERVIEW IS TAKING PLACE ONE HOUR AWAY FROM HERE BY TRAIN, YOU KNOW?
OY OY!
KOTA ?
AH...
ARE YOU SERIOUS ?!
WHAT?
COULD SOMETHING HAVE HAPPENED TO KOTA?

SLASH!
ピーン
THUD!

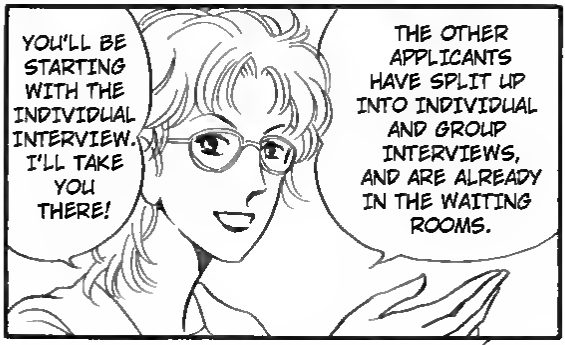
WHOA!
YOWCH!
LET GO OF ME!!
AAAAGH!

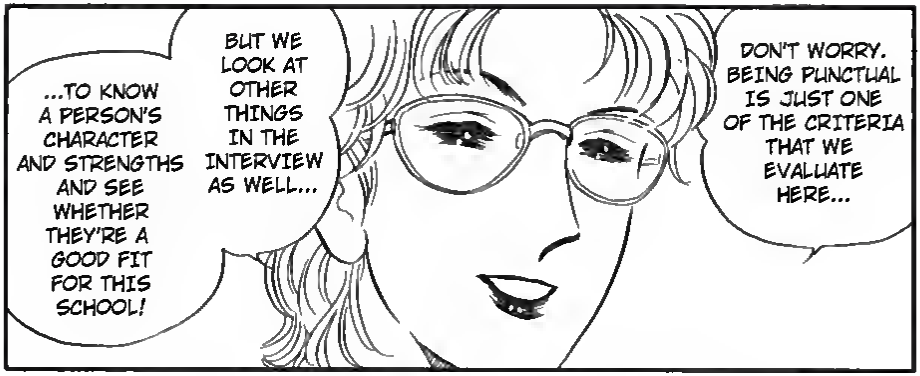
WHOOSH!
WONDER?!
.....
WHAT... WHAT WAS THAT JUST NOW ?!
A DOG SUDDENLY ATTACKED ME AND THEN DISAPPEARED!!
HE BIT ME! HE REALLY DID!!
AGHH! AGHH!
...WE WERE LUCKY TO BE AT THE RIGHT PLACE AT THE RIGHT TIME.
JUST UNBELIEVABLE...
HE LIED ABOUT THERE BEING A KITTY!

HUH ?
ERM... IS IT OKAY IF I GO NOW?
I'VE SEEN HIM SECRETLY TAKING PICTURES OF THE CHILDREN AT THE NEARBY PARK BEFORE! I THOUGHT IT WAS STRANGE!
WHAT A RELIEF!
THANK YOU SO VERY MUCH!
IT'S A GOOD THING NOTHING BAD HAPPENED, BUT DON'T TAKE YOUR EYES OFF YOUR CHILDREN!
I'M SORRY, BUT I HAVE AN INTERVIEW TO GO TO!
AN INTERVIEW ...?



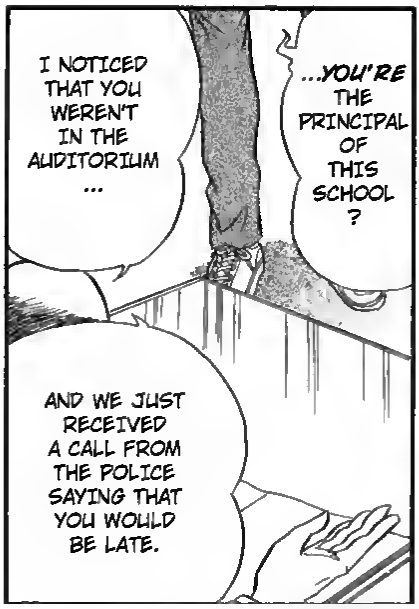
SHOEI VOCATIONAL SCHOOL OF CHILD CARE AND WELFARE


YOU'LL BE STARTING WITH THE INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW. I'LL TAKE YOU THERE!
THE OTHER APPLICANTS HAVE SPLIT UP INTO INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP INTERVIEWS, AND ARE ALREADY IN THE WAITING ROOMS.

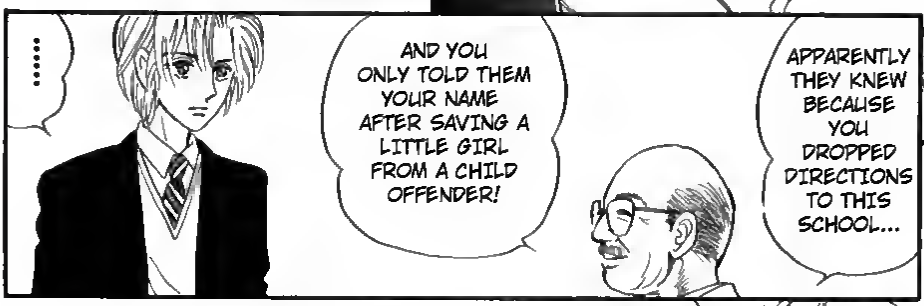

...TO KNOW A PERSON'S CHARACTER AND STRENGTHS AND SEE WHETHER THEY'RE A GOOD FIT FOR THIS SCHOOL!
BUT WE LOOK AT OTHER THINGS IN THE INTERVIEW AS WELL...
DON'T WORRY. BEING PUNCTUAL IS JUST ONE OF THE CRITERIA THAT WE EVALUATE HERE...

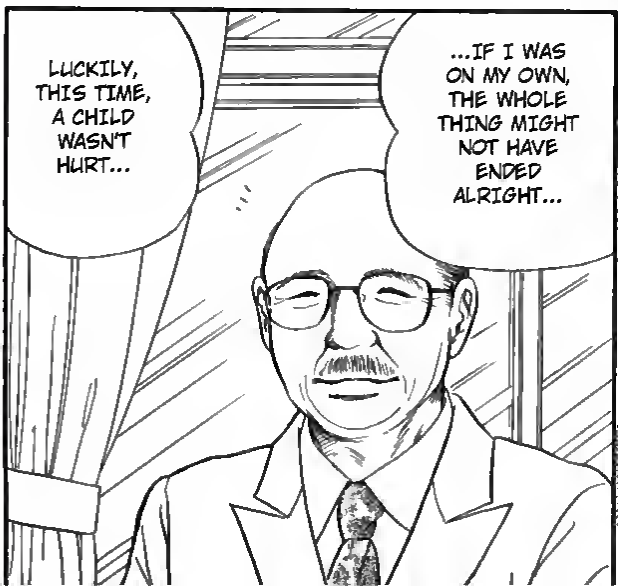
?
AND WE ALSO KNOW WHY YOU'RE LATE!

INTERVIEW WAITING ROOM
EXCUSE ME!


I NOTICED THAT YOU WEREN'T IN THE AUDITORIUM ...
...YOU'RE THE PRINCIPAL OF THIS SCHOOL?
AND WE JUST RECEIVED A CALL FROM THE POLICE SAYING THAT YOU WOULD BE LATE.

YOU HAD A TOUGH MORNING, DIDN'T YOU?
...!


.....
AND YOU ONLY TOLD THEM YOUR NAME AFTER SAVING A LITTLE GIRL FROM A CHILD OFFENDER!
APPARENTLY THEY KNEW BECAUSE YOU DROPPED DIRECTIONS TO THIS SCHOOL...


LUCKILY, THIS TIME, A CHILD WASN'T HURT...
...IF I WAS ON MY OWN, THE WHOLE THING MIGHT NOT HAVE ENDED ALRIGHT...
...

NO...

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO HAVE ENOUGH STRENGTH ...
TO BE ABLE TO PROTECT OTHERS WITHOUT ANY HELP...
WONDER...
THAT'S WHY I FEEL AS IF I STILL HAVE A LONG WAY TO GO!
MOMMY! KOTA'S BACK!
WELCOME HOME!
SO HOW'D IT GO?
ARF!

HEY, KOTA! DID SOMETHING HAPPEN?!
IT'S GOOD TO BE HOME!
WE JUST GOT A CALL FROM THE POLICE.
SHE SEEMS TO KNOW...
WHAT?
WANDA, YOO WENT TO HEP KOTA, WITE?!
WOOF
HUH?
...WHAT DO YOU MEAN?
IF YOU HAD NEVER GOTTEN HURT THAT ONE TIME, TAIYO, I WOULD'VE NEVER BELIEVED IT, MYSELF!
THAT WONDER IS A STRANGE DOG.

WITH THE COOPERATION FROM THE SHOEI VOCATIONAL SCHOOL OF CHILD CARE AND WELFARE

TWO DAYS LATER,

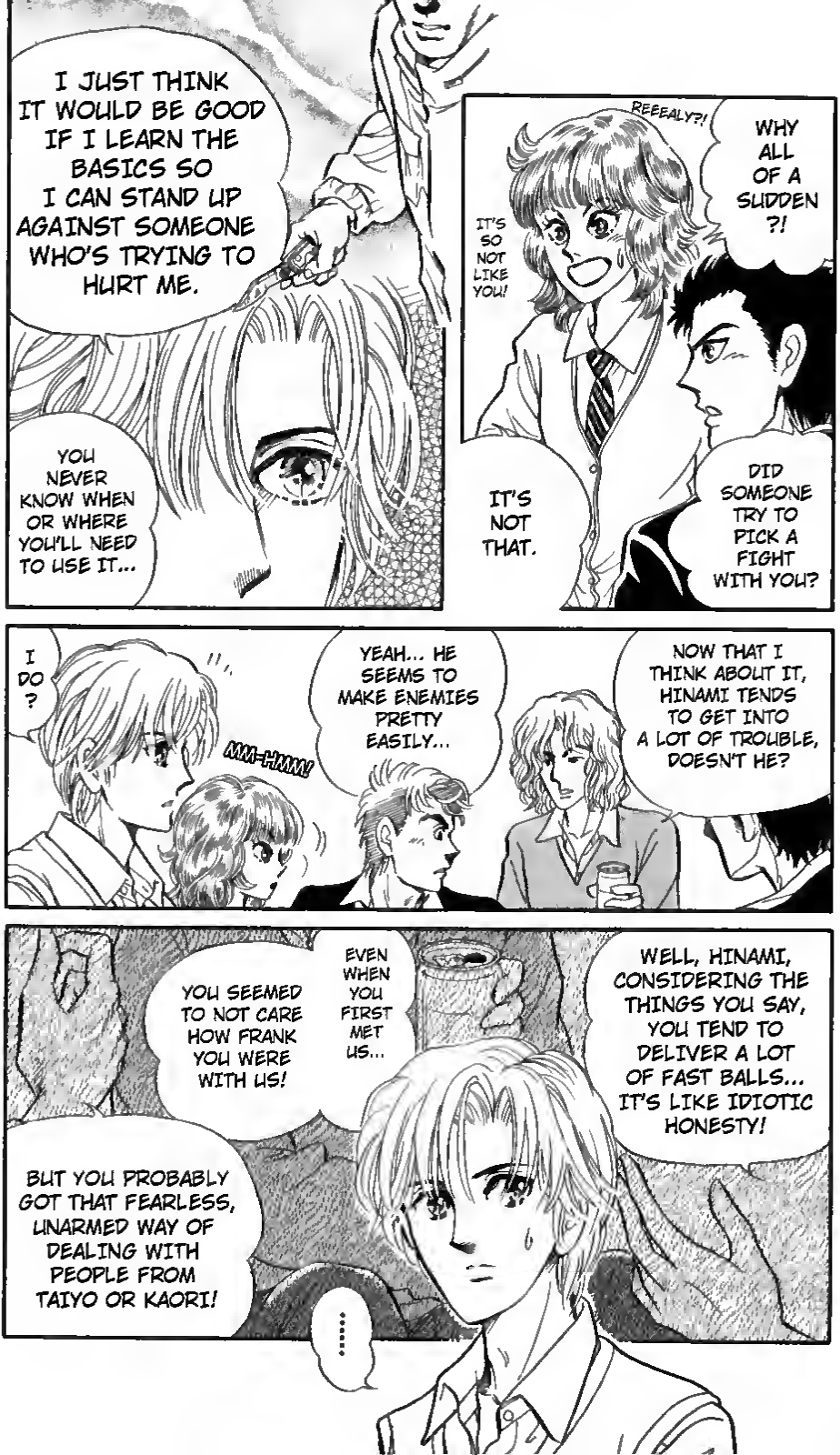
KOTA RECEIVED A LETTER OF ACCEPTANCE FROM THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOL OF CHILD CARE AND WELFARE.

END OF CHAPTER 11

WONDER!

CHAPTER 12

THERE'S SOMEONE WHO WANTS TO LEARN HOW TO FIGHT?
WHO?!
OH?
LEARN HOW TO FIGHT?
HUH?!
FOR SELF-DEFENSE OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT...
IF I WANT TO BE READY TO DEFEND MYSELF, I GUESS I NEED TO LEARN SOMETHING LIKE... KARATE?
ME.

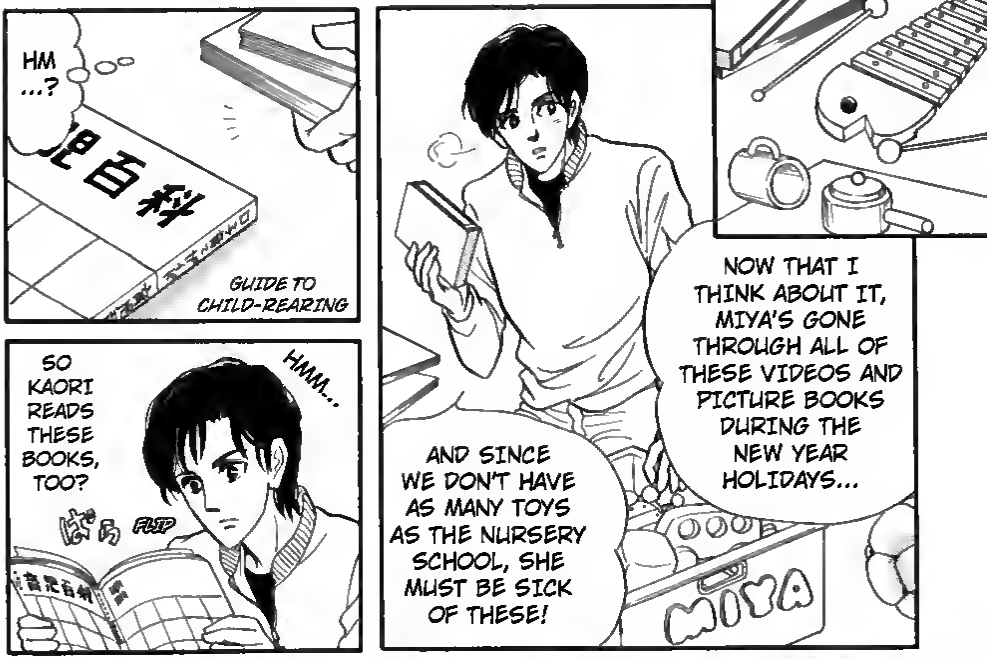

I JUST THINK IT WOULD BE GOOD IF I LEARN THE BASICS SO I CAN STAND UP AGAINST SOMEONE WHO'S TRYING TO HURT ME.
YOU NEVER KNOW WHEN OR WHERE YOU'LL NEED TO USE IT...
REEEALY?!
WHY ALL OF A SUDDEN ?!
IT'S SO NOT LIKE YOU!
IT'S NOT THAT.
DID SOMEONE TRY TO PICK A FIGHT WITH YOU?
I DO ?
MMM-HMMM
YEAH... HE SEEMS TO MAKE ENEMIES PRETTY EASILY...
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, HINAMI TENDS TO GET INTO A LOT OF TROUBLE, DOESN'T HE?
YOU SEEMED TO NOT CARE HOW FRANK YOU WERE WITH US!
EVEN WHEN YOU FIRST MET US...
WELL, HINAMI, CONSIDERING THE THINGS YOU SAY, YOU TEND TO DELIVER A LOT OF FAST BALLS... IT'S LIKE IDIOTIC HONESTY!
BUT YOU PROBABLY GOT THAT FEARLESS, UNARMED WAY OF DEALING WITH PEOPLE FROM TAIYO OR KAORI!
.....

JUST FORGET ABOUT PEOPLE WHO WANT TO GET BACK AT YOU FOR TELLING IT LIKE IT IS!
WHAT'S THE PROBLEM? IT'S NOT LIKE HINAMI'S TRYING TO PICK FIGHTS, RIGHT?!
ドン!
SLAP!
THERE MUST BE SOMEONE HE CAN'T JUST FORGET ABOUT IF HE WANTS TO TOUGHEN UP.
SO ALL OF THOSE INCIDENTS WERE MY OWN FAULT, HUH...
I ALWAYS THOUGHT DEEP INSIDE THAT IT WASN'T, THOUGH...
GAH! JUDO ?!
NOTHING PAST THE JUDO WE LEARN IN GYM CLASS.
BUT STILL, HINAMI, HAVE YOU EVER LEARNED HOW TO FIGHT?
GRUNT!
I MIGHT LOOK THIS WAY, BUT I'M STILL A BLACK BELT, Y'KNOW?!
HUH ...?
WELL, I'VE BEEN DOING KARATE SINCE I WAS A KID.
HEY!!
I DON'T WANT TO IMAGINE HINAMI GETTING A HUGE TORSO AND FAT BOW LEGS LIKE HIM!
DON'T DO JUDO!
YUUUCK!

AND I CAN HELP YOU PRACTICE GETTING YOUR FORM RIGHT!
IF YOU REALLY WANT TO LEARN, I CAN INTRODUCE YOU TO A DOJO!
...!
THAT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ANYTHING!
I PLAY THE KEYBOARD IN A BAND!
IS HE GONNA FIGHT WITH A KEYBOARD?!
IF IT MAKES SOUNDS, THEN WHO CARES?!
SHUT UP!
IT WAS BOTHERING THE WHOLE FAMILY...
ISN'T THAT PIANO COLLECTING DUST SINCE YOU QUIT PIANO LESSONS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL?
I WAS THINKING I WOULD HAVE TO TAKE SOME LESSONS ONCE I START THERE...
NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT, ONE OF THE NURSERY SCHOOL ASSIGNMENTS HAD "PIANO" ON IT.
REALLY?!
OH, WOW! HURRY UP AND DO IT! I HAVE A PIANO AT MY PLACE, SO YOU CAN PRACTICE THERE AS MUCH AS YOU WANT!
YOU KNOW...

THAT'S THE FAST BALL WE'RE TALKING ABOUT!!!
HEY!
THIS IS THE FIRST TIME I'VE FELT GLAD THAT I'M FRIENDS WITH ALL OF YOU.
AND SO ...
AFTER SOME TIME,
THE NEW YEAR WAS HERE.
賀
正
HAPPY NEW YEAR!
TAIYO ...
ARE YOU REALLY SURE IT'S OKAY IF I LEAVE THE HOUSE, AS WELL?
I'M SURE! I'M SURE! MIYA AND I WILL BE FINE JUST THE TWO OF US!
ISN'T THAT RIGHT, MIYA?
WITE!

I'LL TRY TO BE HOME AS SOON AS I CAN, SO HOLD DOWN THE FORT!
WONDER!
ARF!
KOTA LEFT IN THE MORNING SAYING HE HAS KARATE PRACTICE WITH SAWAKI...
AND THE GRANDPARENTS ARE AWAY FOR A NEW YEARS TRIP TO THE HOT SPRINGS.
A.K.A. "MOM"
AND IT'S NOT LIKE I CAN TAKE A CHILD TO MY BOSS' NEW YEARS PARTY, EITHER.
IF SHE HAS WONDER, WHAT AM I HERE FOR?
BYE BYE!
BYE, MOMMY!
ANYWAY...
DO YOU WANNA READ A PICTURE BOOK WITH DADDY?
MIYA?
I GO PWAY WIFF WANDA!
OH...
WOOF!


HM ...?
育児百科
GUIDE TO CHILD-REARING
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, MIYA'S GONE THROUGH ALL OF THESE VIDEOS AND PICTURE BOOKS DURING THE NEW YEAR HOLIDAYS...
AND SINCE WE DON'T HAVE AS MANY TOYS AS THE NURSERY SCHOOL, SHE MUST BE SICK OF THESE!
MIYA
SO KAORI READS THESE BOOKS, TOO?
HMMM...
ぱら FLIP
育児百科

...!
JUST A NICE MAN...?
MIYA THINKS I'M...
WHAAAT?!
育児百科
A CHILD WILL BUILD AN ATTACHMENT TO THE MOTHER AT THE AGE OF ONE, AND UNDERSTANDS THAT BASIC ATTRIBUTE WHEN THEY ARE TWO YEARS OLD.
HOWEVER, THERE ARE CASES WHERE A CHILD WILL ONLY RECOGNIZE THEIR FATHER AS "THAT NICE MAN" UNTIL THEY ARE AROUND THREE YEARS OLD.

ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
YIKES!
NGH!
NGH!
ARF!
ARF!
ARF!
WHAT'S WRONG, WONDER?
ARF!
SLIP!
LUNGE!
TRIP!
MIYA!!

GIGGLE!
GIGGLE!
CATCH!
GRRRASH!
YESH ?
MI...
MIYA...
I LANDED FACE FIRST ON THE FLOOR...
HOW 'BOUT GOING OUT FOR SOME AIR...
WITH YOUR DADDY !!
WOOF?

DRINKS AND SNACKS ...
A TOWEL, WET TISSUES, PLASTIC BAGS...
AND A CHANGE OF CLOTHES SHOULD BE A GOOD IDEA, TOO!
...LEAVE MR. RABBIT AND TEDDY HOME, OKAY, MIYA?
PWEEZE!
WABBY AND BEAH, TOO!
WATCH THE HOUSE WHILE WE'RE GONE, WONDER!
ARF!
OKAY!
NOW YOU WON'T BE COLD!
BYE-BYE, WANDAAA!

ゴォォ
ZWOOOM!
OOOOH!
SK
SHE'S TWO YEARS OLD.
TWOOO!
HOW OLD ARE YOU?
THAT'S THREE, MIYA!
AW! SHE'S SO WELL-BEHAVED!
DADDY, TWAIN GOES FAAAAST!
GIGGLE!
GIGGLE!
THAT'S RIGHT, MIYA! THE TRAIN GOES VERY FAST!
ALTHOUGH IT'S THE FIRST TIME WE'VE GONE ON A TRIP JUST THE TWO OF US ...
IT'S A GOOD THING WE DECIDED TO LEAVE THE HOUSE!
DADDY! WOOK! AMAYSHING!
SILENCE
DADDY! WOOK!
DADDYY!

LOOK, MIYA! THE ANIMALS YOU SAW IN YOUR PICTURE BOOKS ARE HERE!
WOWWWW!
ZOO
動物園
LOVELY!
LOVELY!
WAHHH! TEACHER! TAKUYA'S DOING IT AGAIN!!!
CHATTER
CHATTER
CHATTER
CHATTER
STOP IT, TAKUYA! NO!
LOTS OF MONKEYS HERE, AREN'T THERE?
NUN-KEEEEE!
KIDS, HOLD EACH OTHER'S HANDS SO THAT YOU DON'T GET LOST!

STOP IT!
WAAAHHH! TEACHER!!!
THEY'RE A LITTLE BIT BIGGER THAN YOU, MIYA.
WOOK! FWENDS!
WALK AND FOLLOW THE CHILD IN FRONT OF YOU!
DON'T GET DISTRACTED!
LINE-UP
ARE THEY HERE FROM A NEARBY NURSERY SCHOOL?
THEY TAKE CARE OF THE KIDS EVEN DURING THE HOLIDAYS!
THEY'RE NOT SO DIFFERENT FROM THE ZOO ANIMALS HERE...
WOBBLE!
WAAAAAHHHHH!
CARRY ME, TEACHER!
ME, TOO!
WOBBLE!
WEEEEE!
DON'T GO THAT WAY!
KIIRO
EVEN WITH THREE OF THEM, THEY CAN'T KEEP THE KIDS UNDER CONTROL...
WHAT A TOUGH JOB THEY HAVE!
WAIT! I SAID WAIT!
THAT'S GONNA BE KOTA ONE DAY...
HRMoooo

GIGGLE!
SMILE
IS IT JUST YOU AND DADDY?
WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
I WENN ON TWAIIIN!
OH... HER NAME IS "MIYA".
TODAY THE MOM HAD SOME PLANS, SO I THOUGHT I'D SPEND THE DAY WITH HER ...
I'M SO JEALOUS! MY HUSBAND DOESN'T HELP TO TAKE CARE OF OUR CHILD AT ALL...
HUH?
BUT WHERE'S HER CHILD?
THAT'S NICE... SHE GETS TO SPEND TIME WITH DADDY.
DADDY!
I GOTTA GO WEEWEE! WEEWEE!

HUH ?
IF YOU'D LIKE, I CAN TAKE HER THERE FOR YOU?
YIKES... J-JUST HOLD ON, OKAY?! HOLD ON!!
WHAT?! YOU NEED TO USE THE BATHROOM?
THE BATHROOM IS THAT WAY.
UM... ERM...
DADDY'S GONNA WAIT IN FRONT OF THE RESTROOM, OKAY?
EVEN IF SHE'S SMALL, SHE'S STILL A GIRL! YOU DON'T WANT TO GO TO THE MEN'S BATHROOM, RIGHT?
SORRY FOR THE TROUBLE ...
I CAN'T HOLD IT IN, TEACHER!
JUST HOLD ON A LITTLE LONGER! WE'RE ALMOST THERE!
HURRY! HURRY!!
SAY BYE-BYE TO DADDY!
BYE-BYE, DADDY!

THEY'RE STILL NOT OUT?
KYAHAHAHA!
HEY! DRY YOUR HANDS PROPERLY OR YOU'LL GET FROSTBITE!
YOU'RE GONNA GET LOST IF YOU GO AHEAD!
PITTER PATTER!
EXCUSE ME...
YES?
KIIRO
I'M PRETTY SURE WE WERE THE ONLY ONES THERE WHEN WE WERE WASHING OUR HANDS...
なにっ!!
WHAT?!
A YOUNG WOMAN AND A GIRL ...?
"WHAT'S THIS MAN DOING IN FRONT OF THE WOMEN'S RESTROOM" KINDA STARE
WHAT IS IT?
DO YOU KNOW IF THE YOUNG WOMAN AND THE TWO-YEAR-OLD GIRL IN THERE IS GONNA BE MUCH LONGER?

DASH!
THERE'S ANOTHER ENTRANCE ON THE OTHER SIDE, SO THEY MIGHT'VE GONE OUT THAT WAY.
THE OTHER SIDE ...?
WHY DID THEY GO OUT THIS WAY?

IT CAN'T BE...
SAY BYE-BYE TO DADDY!
THEY'RE NOT HERE ?!
.....
MIYAAA!!

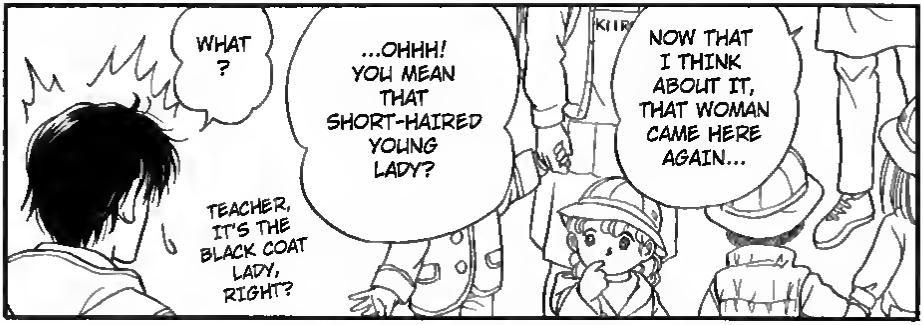
KA-CHANG!
ARF!
HEY, WONDER!
SO THEY WENT ON A TRIP WITHOUT YOU, DID THEY?
MAYBE TAIYO TOOK MIYA TO THE PARK.
HUH?
IS EVERYONE OUT?
SNIFF...

JUST GIVE ME A MINUTE, OKAY?
GLIDE
WELL, LET'S SEE IF WE RUN INTO THEM ON OUR WAY TO THE MARKET!
WONDER ?

DO YOU LIKE THE CANDY ?
UH-HUH ...
YOU'RE SUCH A SWEET GIRL, MIYA!
I'D LIKE TO MAKE YOU MY OWN CHILD...

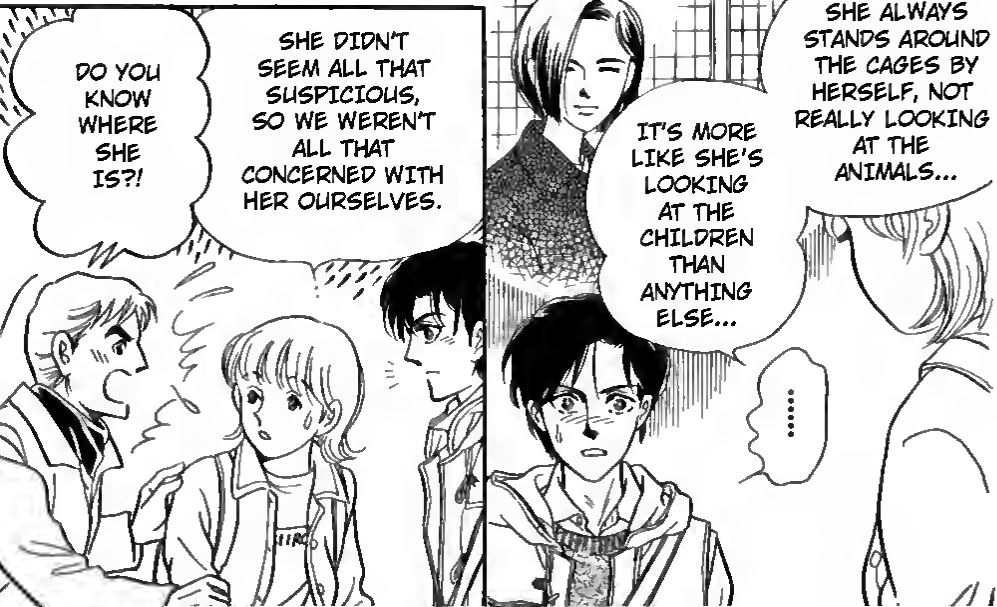
?
DADDY ?
DADDY'S AT HOME RIGHT NOW!
MIYAAA!
YOUR DADDY... WILL BE SO SURPRISED!
MPH!
IF WE GO HOME TOGETHER...
...AND I WON'T FIGHT WITH DADDY ANYMORE, EITHER!
MOMMY WON'T BE MAD AT YOU LIKE SHE USED TO BE...
IF YOU JUST KEEP STAYING SWEET LIKE THIS...
HAAA
HAAA
.....

KIDNAPPED...?!
I THINK YOU SHOULD NOTIFY THE POLICE.
IF THEY DON'T APPEAR EVEN AFTER WE MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT WITHIN THE PARK...
DA-DUM...
EXIT
SHE'S NOT AFRAID OF PEOPLE AT ALL! SHE'S VERY CUTE, ISN'T SHE?
STILL... MOST OF THE VISITORS HERE ARE LITTLE CHILDREN LIKE THE ONE YOU HAVE HERE...
AND SHE WAS LAST SEEN WITH A GIRL IN A BLACK COAT IN HER YOUNG TWENTIES...
HAVE YOU STILL NOT FOUND YOUR CHILD?
HUH? ERM... UHH...
HEY!
WE'RE GOING HOME NOW, KIDS! SAY THANK YOU TO THE PEOPLE AT THE ZOO!
BYE-BYE!
THANK YOU ZOO MAN!
CHATTER!
CHATTER!
THE PO...
POLICE!


WHAT ?
TEACHER, IT'S THE BLACK COAT LADY, RIGHT?
...OHHH! YOU MEAN THAT SHORT-HAIRED YOUNG LADY?
NOW THAT I THINK ABOUT IT, THAT WOMAN CAME HERE AGAIN...

WELL, I WOULDN'T SAY I KNOW HER, BUT I SOMETIMES SEE HER HERE.
THE PERSON THAT TOOK MIYA MIGHT BE THAT WOMAN!
YOU KNOW HER ?!

OUR NURSERY SCHOOL IS NEARBY, SO WE OFTEN BRING THE KIDS HERE.


DO YOU KNOW WHERE SHE IS?!
SHE DIDN'T SEEM ALL THAT SUSPICIOUS, SO WE WEREN'T ALL THAT CONCERNED WITH HER OURSELVES.
IT'S MORE LIKE SHE'S LOOKING AT THE CHILDREN THAN ANYTHING ELSE...
SHE ALWAYS STANDS AROUND THE CAGES BY HERSELF, NOT REALLY LOOKING AT THE ANIMALS...
.....

I DON'T KNOW!! THAT'S WHY I'M LOOKING FOR HER SO FRANTICALLY!!
SHE'S MY WIFE! IS SHE STILL INSIDE THE ZOO?!
I CAME HERE LOOKING FOR HER, THINKING SHE MIGHT BE HERE. SHE LEFT AFTER WE FOUGHT THIS MORNING AND HASN'T COME BACK HOME!
UH... PARDON ME?
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
I WAS WRONG ... GETTING SO ANGRY LIKE THAT.
I CAN STILL HEAR THOSE CRIES...
THAT'S WHY MOMMY COULDN'T BE PATIENT.
DADDY'S ALWAYS LATE COMING HOME FROM WORK...
SO MOMMY'S VERY TIRED, YOU KNOW?

DON'T CRY!
SNIFF...
...!
PLEASE DON'T CRY! I BEG YOU!!
WAH ...
I'M BEGGING YOU, DON'T TORMENT ME LIKE THIS!!
I... I SAID DON'T CRY, DIDN'T I?!

HUH ?!
WANDA!!

ZZZ...ooo
...?
ZZZ...ooo
ZZZ...
BAAAH!
I MADE MY WIFE TAKE CARE OF THE CHILD THE ENTIRE TIME...
IT'S ALL MY FAULT.
I DIDN'T EVEN THINK ABOUT MY WIFE BEING EXHAUSTED FROM TAKING CARE OF HIM...
AHAHAHAHA!
EVEN ON THAT DAY, ONE YEAR AGO...
SHE WAS VERY ON EDGE...
SHE WOULD SCOLD OUR CHILD FOR THE SMALLEST THING.

SHE LEFT OUR CRYING CHILD ALONE IN OUR APARTMENT TO GO SHOPPING.
WHILE SHE WAS GONE, OUR CHILD CLIMBED OVER THE BALCONY TO GO AFTER HER...
'TIL THIS DAY, THAT MISTAKE FOLLOWS MY WIFE...
YOU JUST DON'T GET IT!!
STILL! IF YOU KEEP GRIEVING LIKE THIS, OUR CHILD WON'T BE ABLE TO REST IN PEACE!
THOSE LAST CRIES STILL DON'T LEAVE ME!!
WE TALKED ABOUT THAT THIS MORNING, TOO.
...TO MY WIFE, THIS ZOO MIGHT BE THE ONE PLACE WHERE SHE CAN BE REMINDED OF THE LAUGHTER OF CHILDREN...
THAT DOESN'T GIVE HER THE RIGHT TO TAKE MIYA!!
EVEN SO!

A DOG... IN A ZOO?!
OF COURSE! TH-THAT'S WHY I'M LOOKING FOR HER!
SH!
...I HEAR A DOG!
HUH?
ARF! ARF! ARF!
WONDER?!
WHOOSH!

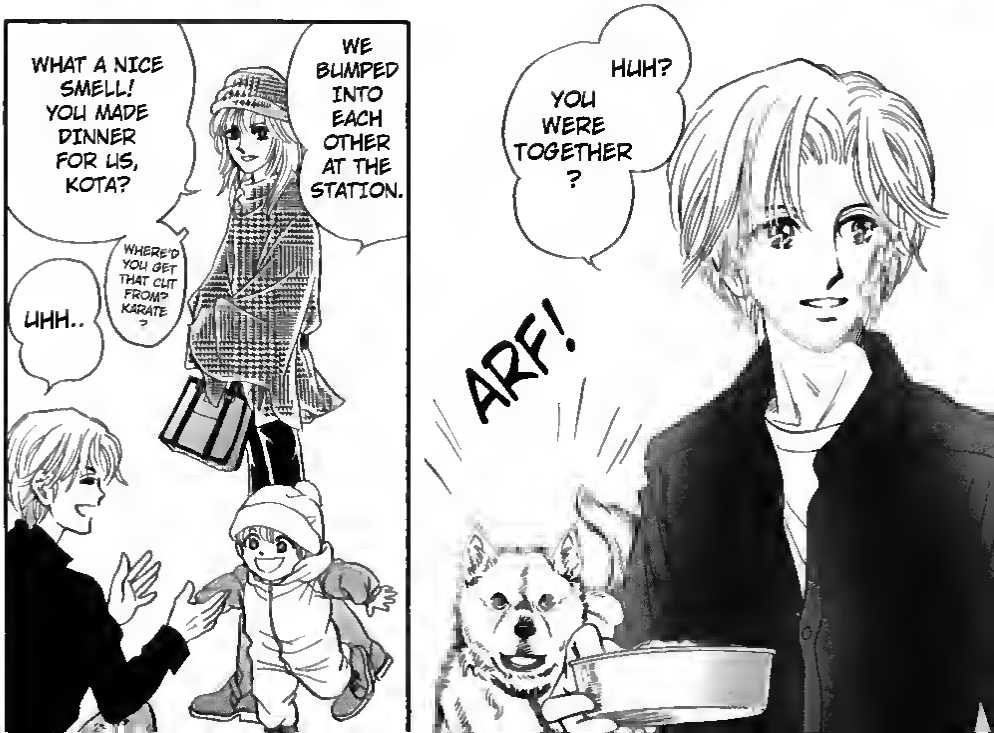
...!
GASP!

PHEW.
.....
ZZZooo
THANK YOU FOR KEEPING MIYA SAFE...
SHE WAS ABOUT TO CRY BECAUSE SHE WAS SLEEPY...
SHE'S A GOOD GIRL...
IF... IF SHE STARTED TO CRY, I MIGHT'VE DONE SOMETHING I WOULDN'T BE ABLE TO UNDO...
I DON'T KNOW MYSELF ANYMORE...
I...
I'M SO SORRY ...

YOU'RE BACK, WONDER?
SLURP! SLURP!
WHERE'D YOU GO?
SO NO WALK, THEN?
RUSTLE
RUSTLE
YAWWWN!

TAIYO?
Z
YIPES!
UM... UH... WELL... THE WEATHER WAS GOOD, SO...
DID YOU GO SOME-WHERE ?
I CAN'T STAY AT A DRINKING PARTY FOREVER WHEN I HAVE A CHILD AT HOME!
Y-YOU'RE HOME E-EARLY...
AW... OUR MIYA'S SOUND ASLEEP! ♡

HMM...
AND WANDA WAS THEA, TWOO!
WIFF OUW FWENDS!
HEH HEH! MAYBE IN HER DREAMS...?
EEP!
WE SHAW WOTSA MUNKEES!!
MONKEYS?
WELL, THAT'S GOOD TO HEAR! DID YOU HAVE A FUN TRIP WITH DADDY ?
YESH!!


WHAT A NICE SMELL! YOU MADE DINNER FOR US, KOTA?
WE BUMPED INTO EACH OTHER AT THE STATION.
WHERE'D YOU GET THAT CUT FROM? KARATE ?
UHH..
HUH? YOU WERE TOGETHER ?
ARF!

END OF CHAPTER 12

WONDER!
CHAPTER 13

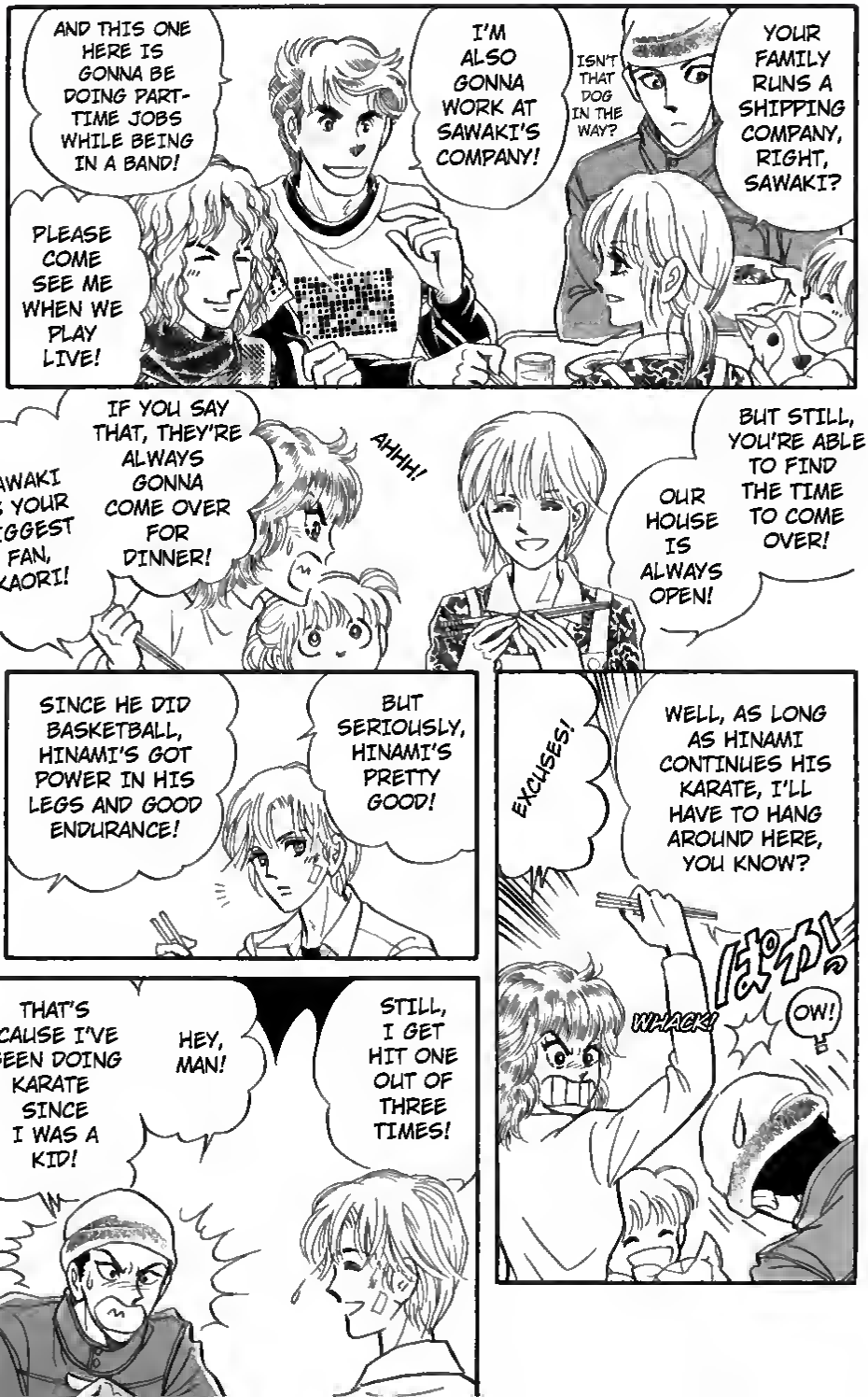
……
OH... OH?
ぎょ
SURPRISE
OOH!
ひょこっ
PEEK

JOLT!
DON'T SHAY I'M HEEA!
HUH ?
RUSTLE
GLANCE
EEEEK!
Y... YOU'RE PLAYING HIDE-AND-SEEK?!
...?
SNEAK
?

HEY, IT'S MIYA! HOW ARE YOU?
WEWCUM HOME, KOTAAA!
ARF! ARF!
IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE I'VE SEEN WONDER, TOO!
KAITO?
!
WHO ARE YOU CALLING "LI'L"?!
AND LI'L HINAMI, ARE YOU SHOPLIFTING AS ALWAYS?
HUH? KAITO ?!
HELLO EVERYONE!
RATTLE
ガラ
AND I HAVEN'T SHOPLIFTED SINCE THAT ONE TIME!
I MEAN, YOU ARE SMALLER THAN HINAMI, Y'KNOW?
KOTA FACE IS CUT!

YUP! SO THANKS FOR LETTING ME STAY HERE FOR AWHILE!
ENTRANCE EXAM?
C'MON, AUNT! NOT YOU, TOO! DON'T YOU KNOW THAT THE COLLEGE I'M TAKING MY ENTRANCE EXAM AT IS HERE?!
...DID YOU RUN AWAY FROM HOME AGAIN?
I DIDN'T HEAR ANYTHING ABOUT THIS.
TAIYO IS AWAY ON A BUSINESS TRIP...
... FOR AWHILE ?!
WELL, I GUESS IT WON'T BE A PROBLEM TO MAKE DINNER FOR ONE MORE PERSON...
I'LL GO AHEAD AND DROP MY STUFF IN KOTA'S ROOM!
BUT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY!
YEAH. I DIDN'T TELL UNCLE EITHER.
I'M ONLY HERE TO TAKE MY ENTRANCE EXAM, SO THERE'S NOTHING FOR YOU TO WORRY ABOUT!

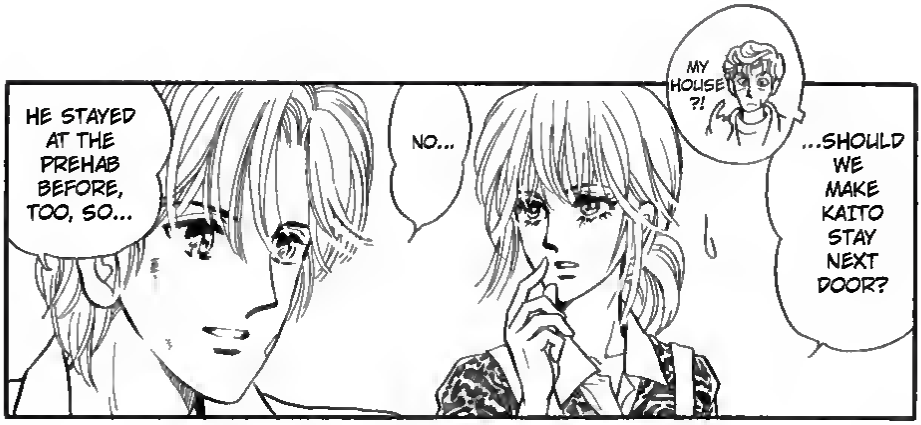
IF I EAT TOO MUCH, I WON'T BE ABLE TO STUDY!
THAT'S ALL YOU'RE HAVING? THERE'S STILL SOME MEAT LEFT, Y'KNOW?
GURGLE
GURGLE
THANK YOU! I'M DONE NOW!
IKUMI, I HEARD YOU'RE GOING TO VOCATIONAL SCHOOL TO BECOME A STYLIST!
WHAT ARE YOU ALL DOING AFTER YOU GRADUATE ?
YUP!
WELL, I'M GONNA HELP AROUND THE HOUSE UNTIL I GET MY TRUCK LICENSE.
"EXAM" THIS, "EXAM" THAT...
THE EXAM STUDENT WILL EXCUSE HIMSELF!
HE'S AN ANNOYING JERK, ISN'T HE?
IS HE REALLY HINAMI'S COUSIN?


AND THIS ONE HERE IS GONNA BE DOING PART-TIME JOBS WHILE BEING IN A BAND!
I'M ALSO GONNA WORK AT SAWAKI'S COMPANY!
ISN'T THAT DOG IN THE WAY?
YOUR FAMILY RUNS A SHIPPING COMPANY, RIGHT, SAWAKI?
PLEASE COME SEE ME WHEN WE PLAY LIVE!
SAWAKI IS YOUR BIGGEST FAN, KAORI!
IF YOU SAY THAT, THEY'RE ALWAYS GONNA COME OVER FOR DINNER!
AHHH!
OUR HOUSE IS ALWAYS OPEN!
BUT STILL, YOU'RE ABLE TO FIND THE TIME TO COME OVER!
SINCE HE DID BASKETBALL, HINAMI'S GOT POWER IN HIS LEGS AND GOOD ENDURANCE!
BUT SERIOUSLY, HINAMI'S PRETTY GOOD!
EXCUSES!
WELL, AS LONG AS HINAMI CONTINUES HIS KARATE, I'LL HAVE TO HANG AROUND HERE, YOU KNOW?
WHACK!
OW!
THAT'S 'CAUSE I'VE BEEN DOING KARATE SINCE I WAS A KID!
HEY, MAN!
STILL, I GET HIT ONE OUT OF THREE TIMES!

YES, YOU'VE REACHED THE HINAMIS.
YOU DO THAT TO HINAMI AND I SEND YOU TO THE HOSPITAL!
THE STRONGEST ONE HERE IS IKUMI.
GIGGLE
IF I DON'T GO EASY ON YOU, I CAN SEND YOU TO THE HOSPITAL, YOU KNOW?!
YOU DON'T SUDDENLY BECOME GOOD WHEN YOU ONLY TRAINED TODAY AND YESTERDAY!
TR
TR
PARDON?
KOTA, CAN YOU CALL KAITO IN HERE?
!
IT'S TAIYO'S ELDER SISTER-IN-LAW...
THEY APPARENTLY CAME HERE TOGETHER FOR THE ENTRANCE EXAM, BUT KAITO RAN AWAY FROM THE HOTEL THEY'RE STAYING AT!
WHAT IS UP WITH THAT GUY?!

YEAH, IT'S ME. WHAT DO YOU WANT ?
SIGH
GR! DAMMIT!
I DON'T REMEMBER YOU TELLING ME NOT TO TELL HER.
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT I CAN'T STAND HER?!
WHAAAT? IT'S MY MOM?!
YOU TOLD HER THAT I WAS HERE?!
.....
SHUT UP! THAT'S THE PRESSURE I'M TALKING ABOUT!!
DIDN'T I TELL YOU THAT I DIDN'T WANT ANYONE COMING WITH ME ALL THE WAY HERE?!
KOTA...

ERMooo
I'M GOING STRAIGHT TO THE EXAM CENTRE FROM HERE!
WELL, I'M MORE RELAXED BEING HERE, ANYWAY!
NO! I'M NOT GOING BACK TO THAT HOTEL!!
OKAY! OKAY! I'M HANGING UP!
SIGH. YEAH, I KNOW!
HEY! DON'T LOOK AT ME! THAT WOMAN WAS THE ONE GETTING ALL WORRIED!
WHO BRINGS THEIR MOM ALL THE WAY TO A COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAM?
.....
MOTHER SENDS HER WARMEST REGARDS!
NIKKO
SMILE


HE STAYED AT THE PREHAB BEFORE, TOO, SO...
NO...
MY HOUSE?!
...SHOULD WE MAKE KAITO STAY NEXT DOOR?

WHY DOES HE ALWAYS GET TO STAY AT *YOUR* HOUSE?!
HEY!
IF IT GETS REALLY BAD, YOU WANNA TAKE REFUGE AT MY PLACE?
IT'S NOT LIKE HE'LL BE THERE FOREVER.
WHAAAT?
IT'S OKAY.

IS THAT JERK PLANNING ON STAYING OVER UNTIL THE ENTRANCE EXAMS?!

JUST THOUGHT I'D MENTION IT, BUT...
YOU'RE GETTING MORE CUTS AND BRUISES ON YOU EVERY DAY, AREN'T YOU, KOTA?!
I'M SORRY!
THE CLIENTS MIGHT GET THE WRONG IDEA.
IT IS RARE FOR KOTA, THOUGH! YOU BEEN GETTING INTO FIGHTS?
NO, NO! I STARTED KARATE LESSONS JUST RECENTLY!
REALLY?! ARE YOU GONNA SERVE AS THIS SHOP'S BODYGUARD?
IT'S MORE FOR "SELF-DEFENSE" ...
WHEN HE BECOMES A NURSERY SCHOOL TEACHER IN THE FUTURE, HE MIGHT NEED TO PROTECT ALL THOSE CHILDREN FROM DANGER, YOU KNOW?
OOOH!
I'M NOT GOOD ENOUGH YET, BUT MAYBE I CAN BE USEFUL ONE DAY PROTECTING THIS BAR, TOO!
OH ?

ARE YOU... GONNA FIRE ME?
WELL, IT WOULD BE A HUGE HELP IF YOU CONTINUE WORKING HERE, BUT...
WELL, AREN'T YOU GOING TO STOP WORKING HERE ONCE YOU GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL, KOTA?
WHY THE "OH" ...?
WHEN I THINK ABOUT IT, YOUR MOTHER STARTED WORKING HERE...
RIGHT AROUND THE SAME AGE YOU ARE NOW, KOTA!
WHEN SHE WAS IN HIGH SCHOOL, SHE CAME TO TOKYO WITH A LOCAL BOY...
AND EVEN WHEN SHE BROKE UP WITH HIM, SHE DIDN'T GO BACK TO HER HOMETOWN ...
SHE SAID SHE WAS GONNA CONTINUE WORKING AT THE BAR...
THAT'S WHEN SHE MET MR. SHIMAOKA, WHO TOOK UP A JOB POST IN TOKYO AWAY FROM HIS FAMILY.
IT WAS ONLY WHEN HE RETURNED TO HIS FAMILY THAT SHE REALIZED SHE WAS PREGNANT...

AFTER BEING AT A LOSS AND WORRYING ABOUT WHAT TO DO, SHE FINALLY RETURNED TO HER HOMETOWN ...
...ONLY TO COME RIGHT BACK TO THIS BAR...
YOU OFTEN DID SAY THAT IT WAS THANKS TO MY MOTHER THAT I WAS BORN...
SHE SAID, "IF MY FAMILY ABANDONS ME..."
"THEN, I'LL JUST MAKE A FAMILY OF MY OWN".
KOTA...
YOU WERE TRULY THE ONLY PERSON SHE HAD TO CHERISH AS A FAMILY, YOU KNOW?
YOU MEAN TAIYO ...?
WHY?
EVEN THOUGH SHE KNEW THAT SHE HAD A LITTLE BROTHER LIVING NEARBY FOR FIVE YEARS, SHE DIDN'T CONTACT HIM.
THERE WAS A MISUNDER-STANDING BETWEEN THE TWO OF THEM.
MISUNDER-STANDING?

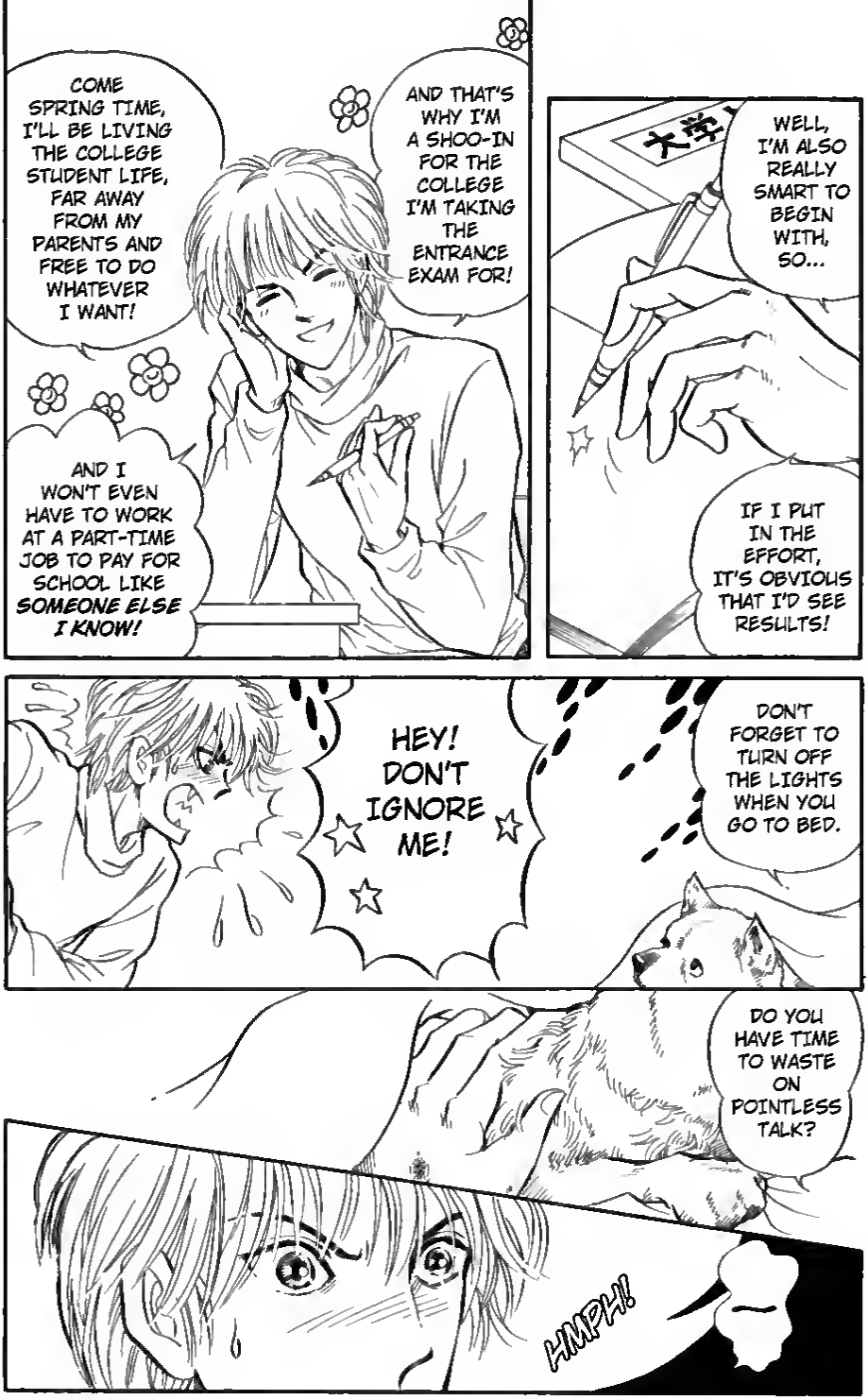
WHEN YOUR MOTHER RETURNED TO HER HOME, APPARENTLY SOMEONE TOLD HER THAT SHE WAS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE FAMILY.
THAT'S WHY... SHE WAS AFRAID SHE'D END UP CAUSING PROBLEMS FOR HER LITTLE BROTHER...
EMBARRASSMENT?
MANY YEARS LATER, WHEN THEY FINALLY REUNITED, HE WAS AT A LOSS FOR WHAT TO SAY, AND IN THAT MOMENT OF HESITATION, SHE WALKED AWAY.
HIS BIG SISTER HAD LEFT WHEN HE WAS A CHILD...
AND FOR TAIYO...
EVEN WHEN HE HEARD FROM HIS OLDER BROTHER THAT SHE WAS NEARBY, HE INTENTIONALLY AVOIDED MAKING CONTACT WITH HER.
TAIYO THOUGHT THAT SHE WANTED NOTHING TO DO WITH HIM.
CONVINCED THAT HIS BIG SISTER HAD HER OWN LIFE...
IF ONLY THEY HAD A CHANCE TO TALK THINGS OUT WHEN SHE WAS STILL ALIVE...
BUT... WHO COULD HAVE EVER THOUGHT THAT SHE WOULD DIE SO EARLY...?

I REMEMBER THAT TIME...
KOTA, A BOTTLE OVER HERE, PLEASE!
YUP!
GOOD EVENING!
BOY, IT SURE IS COLD!
OH! W-WELCOME! COME ON IN!
KOTA ...?
I'M... YOUR MOTHER'S LITTLE BROTHER ...
DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS? I'M YOUR UNCLE.
.....

WHEN I MET HER FOR THE FIRST TIME, SHE KNEELED DOWN TO MY EYE LEVEL TO TALK TO ME...
KAORI, TOO...
BOTH TAIYO AND KAORI WERE ADULTS WHO WERE NATURALLY ABLE TO DO THAT...
EVEN THOUGH I WAS ONLY 9 YEARS OLD, THEY TREATED ME LIKE AN EQUAL...
IF THAT IS TRUE...
I THINK YOU HAVE A TALENT FOR TAKING CARE OF KIDS...
OH ?
?
THAT'S GREAT, KOTA! YOUR LIFE STARTS NOW!
DO YOUR BEST, OKAY ?!
UH... YES, SIR!
THEN I WANT TO BECOME A HELPING HAND TO THE KIDS WHO NEED ONE...
JUST LIKE KAORI AND TAIYO HAD BEEN FOR ME...

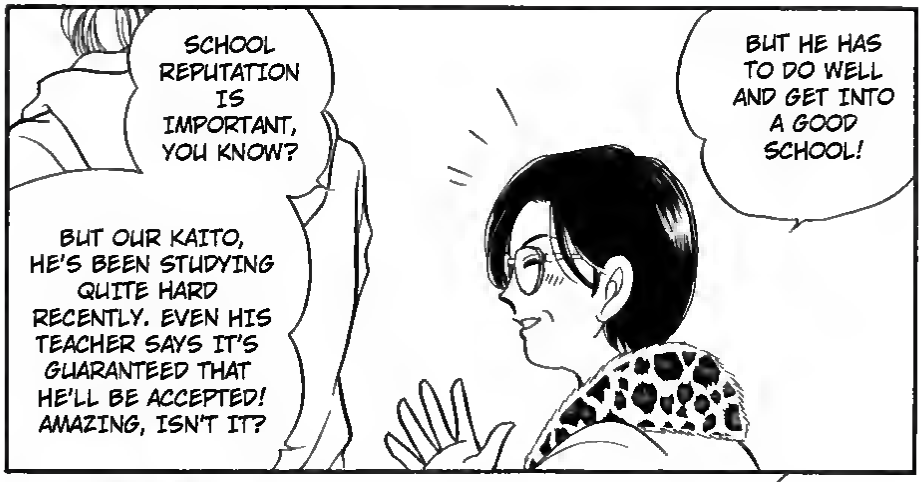
ARF!
AH!
BANG!
DID YOU LOCK THE DOOR?
UHHH... WELL... ER... MAYBE...
HEH HEH HEH...
IF I LEAVE IT OPEN, THAT DOG COMES IN HERE UNINVITED AND THE LITTLE SQUIRT PEEKS IN FROM OUTSIDE.
I CAN'T STUDY, THEN, YOU KNOW?
AND YOU DON'T HAVE A HEATER, HERE!
AND IT'S STILL COLD WHEN YOU TURN ON THE HOT CARPET!
YOU SURE HAVE A LOT OF PATIENCE TO LIVE IN A CRAPPY OLD DUMP LIKE THIS!

I DON'T LIKE THAT DOG...
WON'T AUNTIE BE LONELY BEING IN THE HOTEL ALL BY HERSELF?
URGH...
BUT THEN AGAIN, I GUESS YOU DON'T REALLY HAVE TO STUDY FOR THE ENTRANCE EXAM IF YOU'RE JUST GOING TO VOCATIONAL SCHOOL!
WOOF!
WONDER, YOU CAN COME IN!
BUT SINCE MY MARKS WENT WAY UP THIS TIME...
WAIT... I DIDN'T TELL YOU, DID I? I REALLY STARTED TO STUDY SINCE THE LAST TIME WE MET!
SHE'S THE ONE THAT WANTED TO COME HERE!
TH-THAT'S HER PROBLEM, NOT MINE! I DIDN'T EVEN ASK HER TO GO OUT OF HER WAY TO DO THIS!


COME SPRING TIME, I'LL BE LIVING THE COLLEGE STUDENT LIFE, FAR AWAY FROM MY PARENTS AND FREE TO DO WHATEVER I WANT!
AND THAT'S WHY I'M A SHOO-IN FOR THE COLLEGE I'M TAKING THE ENTRANCE EXAM FOR!
AND I WON'T EVEN HAVE TO WORK AT A PART-TIME JOB TO PAY FOR SCHOOL LIKE SOMEONE ELSE I KNOW!
大学
WELL, I'M ALSO REALLY SMART TO BEGIN WITH, SO...
IF I PUT IN THE EFFORT, IT'S OBVIOUS THAT I'D SEE RESULTS!
HEY! DON'T IGNORE ME!
DON'T FORGET TO TURN OFF THE LIGHTS WHEN YOU GO TO BED.
DO YOU HAVE TIME TO WASTE ON POINTLESS TALK?
HMPH!

APPARENTLY, SOMEONE TOLD HER THAT SHE WAS AN EMBARRASSMENT TO THE FAMILY...
SNIFF...
.....
HAHAHA!
K... KOTA? IS THAT YOU?

!
IS THIS TAIYO'S CHILD?
YES.
I AM MIYA!
OH, I WAS AFRAID I GOT LOST! IT'S HARD TO FIND YOUR WAY AROUND HERE!
KOTA, DEAR, YOU'RE GOING TO VOCATIONAL SCHOOL, RIGHT?
SO YOU PASSED FOR SURE?
I MEAN, THOSE KINDS OF PLACES STILL HAVE EXAMS, AM I RIGHT?
KOTA DEER ?
?
SO HE GAVE HER THE SAME NAME AS HER...
I DON'T KNOW WHAT TAIYO WAS THINKING, NAMING HIS DAUGHTER THE SAME NAME AS SOMEONE WHO'S DEAD...
IT'S BAD LUCK.
IT GOES ON RECOMM-ENDATIONS, SO IT ALL HAPPENED LAST YEAR.
OH... IS THAT SO? WELL, THAT'S GOOD.
OUR POOR KAITO, ON THE OTHER HAND... HE HAS IT TOUGH FROM HERE ON OUT!
ISH JUS KOTA!


SCHOOL REPUTATION IS IMPORTANT, YOU KNOW?
BUT OUR KAITO, HE'S BEEN STUDYING QUITE HARD RECENTLY. EVEN HIS TEACHER SAYS IT'S GUARANTEED THAT HE'LL BE ACCEPTED! AMAZING, ISN'T IT?
BUT HE HAS TO DO WELL AND GET INTO A GOOD SCHOOL!

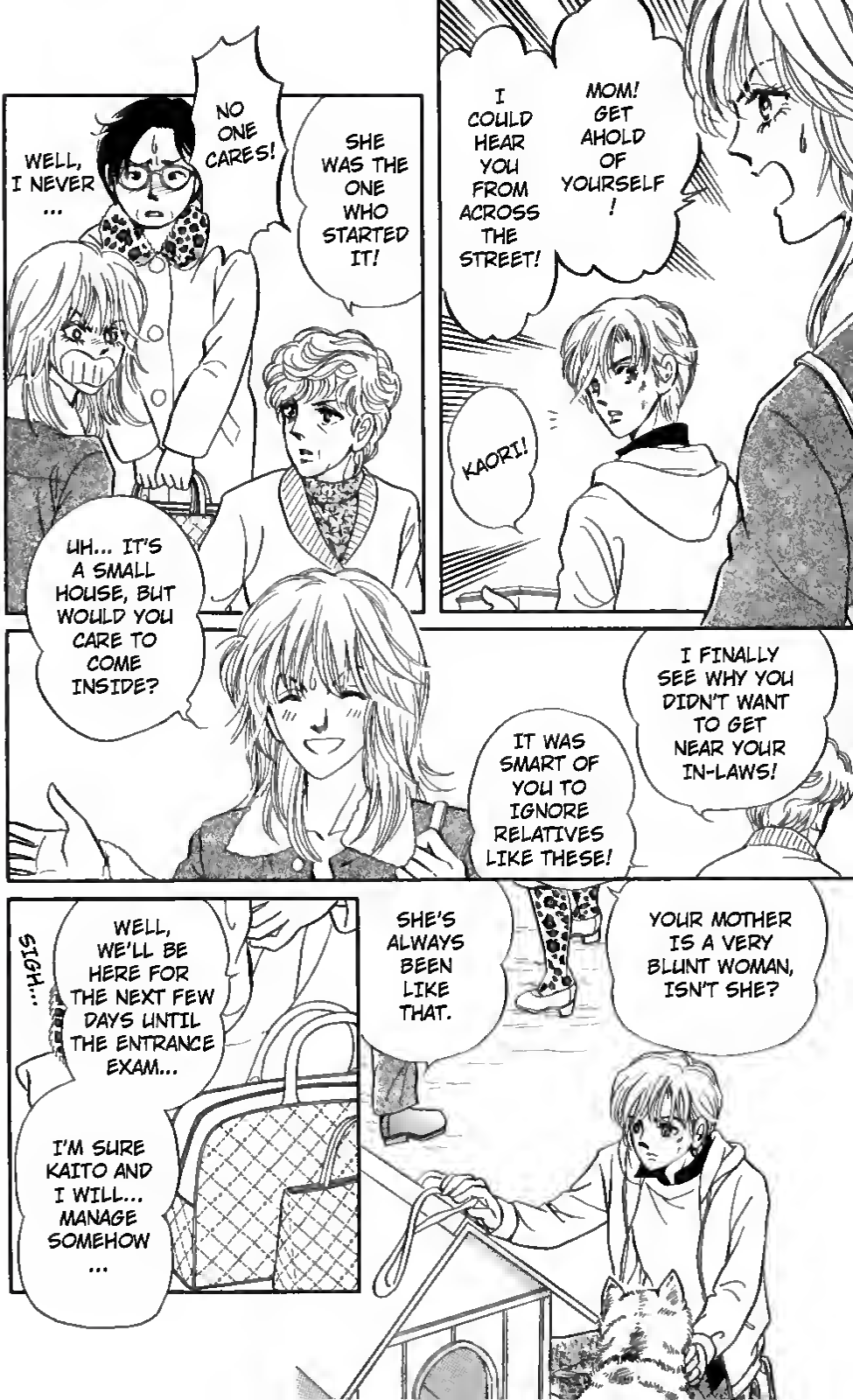
UH... THAT'S QUITE ALRIGHT. I DON'T WANT TO INTERRUPT HIS STUDIES, YOU KNOW?
AND WHEN IS TAIYO BACK FROM HIS BUSINESS TRIP?

SHOULD I CALL KAITO FOR YOU?
ガラ
SLIDE
KAORI SHOULD BE BACK SOON...
.....

WELCOME HOME!
AND WHO'S THE VISITOR ?
MAYBE THIS EVENING ...
ARF!
GWANMA!

AHAHA!
THE TWO OF US ARE RENTING THE HOUSE NEXT DOOR!
PARDON?
AT OUR AGE, IT'S A HASSLE TO UPDATE THE NAMES IN THE FAMILY REGISTER, SO WE JUST LIVE TOGETHER.
KAORI'S MOTHER AND STEP-FATHER.
AND WHO'S THIS?
WE MADE A DINNER SIDE DISH FOR YOU.
WE HAVEN'T RETURNED THE FAMILY REGISTER, YET, THOUGH.
SO? IS THIS THE MOTHER OF THE RUNAWAY?
RUNAWAY?
DON'T MAKE IT SOUND SO SCANDALOUS!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
SURPRISE
RUMBLE!

HE WON'T LISTEN EVEN IF YOU SAY IT A DIFFERENT WAY...
YOU DON'T REALLY THINK YOU CAN RELAX AND STUDY IN THIS DUMPY... CRAMPED PLACE, DO YOU?!
I TOLD YOU!! I DON'T CARE!!
"WHAT AM I DOING HERE"?! AFTER I WENT THROUGH ALL THE TROUBLE TO GET YOU A NICE HOTEL!
WHAT DID YOU SAY ?!
WHAAAT?!
IF YOU SPOIL A KID WHO HASN'T BEEN BROUGHT UP WELL, THEY'LL ONLY TAKE MORE ADVANTAGE OF YOU!
JUST LEAVE HIM ALONE.
ER... I'LL TAKE MIYA TO OUR PLACE...
THANKS...
MY DAUGHTER IS MY DAUGHTER!! I DON'T KNOW ANYTHING ABOUT THAT!
THAT WAS BEFORE THEY WERE MARRIED AND REGISTERED, IF I RECALL!
COME TO THINK OF IT... KAORI ALSO STAYED HERE WITH TAIYO WHEN SHE WAS A COLLEGE STUDENT, DIDN'T SHE?
A PERSON WHO LACKS COMMON SENSE HAS NO RIGHT TO SAY SUCH THINGS TO OTHERS!
I'M SORRY, BUT I DIDN'T LEAD A BORING LIFE WHERE MY ONLY JOY COMES FROM FOLLOWING MY CHILD EVERYWHERE.
WELL, LIKE MOTHER LIKE DAUGHTER, RIGHT?
HAH! THE POT CALLS THE KETTLE BLACK!!


MOM! GET AHOLD OF YOURSELF!
I COULD HEAR YOU FROM ACROSS THE STREET!
KAORI!
NO ONE CARES!
SHE WAS THE ONE WHO STARTED IT!
WELL, I NEVER ...
UH... IT'S A SMALL HOUSE, BUT WOULD YOU CARE TO COME INSIDE?
I FINALLY SEE WHY YOU DIDN'T WANT TO GET NEAR YOUR IN-LAWS!
IT WAS SMART OF YOU TO IGNORE RELATIVES LIKE THESE!
YOUR MOTHER IS A VERY BLUNT WOMAN, ISN'T SHE?
SHE'S ALWAYS BEEN LIKE THAT.
SIGH...
WELL, WE'LL BE HERE FOR THE NEXT FEW DAYS UNTIL THE ENTRANCE EXAM...
I'M SURE KAITO AND I WILL... MANAGE SOMEHOW ...

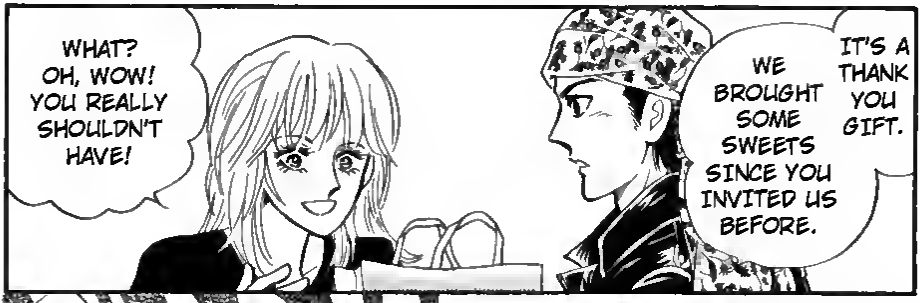
YAHOO! MIYAAA! YOUR DADDY'S HOOOME!
UH... WH- WHAT?!
PARDON?
IT'S NOT LIKE I HAVE A CHOICE, DO I? KAITO SAID HE'S GONNA STAY HERE.
I CHECKED OUT OF THE HOTEL.
.....
SO... I GUESS MIYA'S NEXT DOOR, THEN...
RETREAT
TAIYO !!
DEAR!
I JUST DIDN'T THINK IT WAS SOMETHING I HAD TO INTERRUPT HIS BUSINESS TRIP FOR...
YOU NEVER TOLD HIM THAT KAITO CAME HERE TO STAY?
WHAT... BRINGS YOU HERE... ALL OF A SUDDEN?
UH... HELLOOO... IT'S BEEN A-AWHILE...

I NEVER LIKED HER...
SHE NEVER CAME TO OUR WEDDING, AND WHEN WE DID GO TO VISIT, SHE WOULD ALWAYS CUT US DOWN...
.....
AND SHE GOT INTO A SPAT WITH MY MOTHER NEXT DOOR!
IF YOU HAD TOLD ME, I COULD'VE LET HER STAY ONE NIGHT LONGER...
WHISPER WHISPER
IT'S NOT A JOKE, TAIYO! THIS IS YOUR OLDER BROTHER'S WIFE, YOU KNOW!
SO DUSTY...
DOES YOUR MOTHER-IN-LAW ALWAYS TAKE CARE OF YOUR CHILD?
UH...
NO... MIYA STAYS AT A NURSERY SCHOOL WHILE KAORI AND I ARE AT WORK...
OH, TAIYO, DEAR!
SHE'S CALLING YOU, "TAIYO DEAR"...
KOTA AND WONDER ALSO HELP LOOK AFTER HER.
WELL, IT'S UNTHINKABLE TO ME MAKING A CHILD MOVE AROUND OUTSIDE LIKE THAT!

I DON'T KNOW HOW MUCH YOU MAKE, TAIYO DEAR, BUT...
EVEN IF YOU ARE POOR,
I STILL THINK IT'S BEST THAT THE MOTHER STAY HOME AND PROPERLY RAISE THE CHILD!
BUT IF YOU SPOIL THEM TOO MUCH, THE CHILD WILL GROW TO BE SELF-ABSORBED.
THERE ARE CHILDREN WHO SHOPLIFT WITHOUT THINKING,
OR SCAM OTHERS TO GIVE THEM MONEY, EVEN...
LILP!
WELL, THAT'S THE PARENTS' RESPONSIBILITY.
IF YOU CARE FOR THEM PROPERLY, THEY WILL GROW UP TO BE PROPER, AS WELL!
WOW! AND YOU MAKE SUCH A GREAT EXAMPLE!
YOU HAVE SO MUCH CONFIDENCE IN RAISING CHILDREN!
AND KOTA?
IS HE WITH KAITO RIGHT NOW?
WHAAAT? LI'L HINAMI IS STILL AROUND?!
THAT'S KOTA'S ROOM...

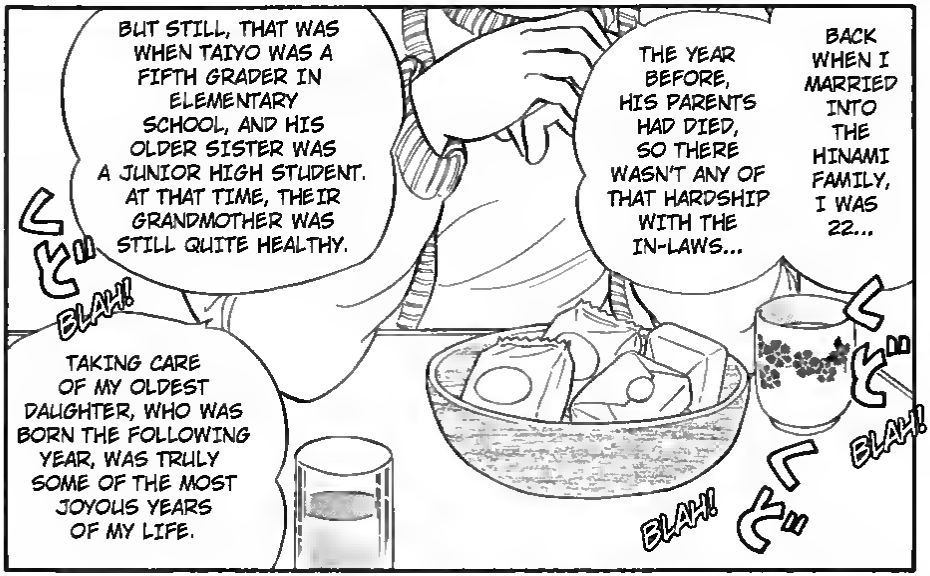
WHAAAT? HE'S ALREADY AT THE SNACK BAR?
KOTA LEFT FOR WORK EARLY, SAYING THAT HE WAS GONNA HAVE DINNER OVER THERE.
OKAY, WELL... GIVE THIS TO MIYA.
SO WE JUST MISSED HIM?

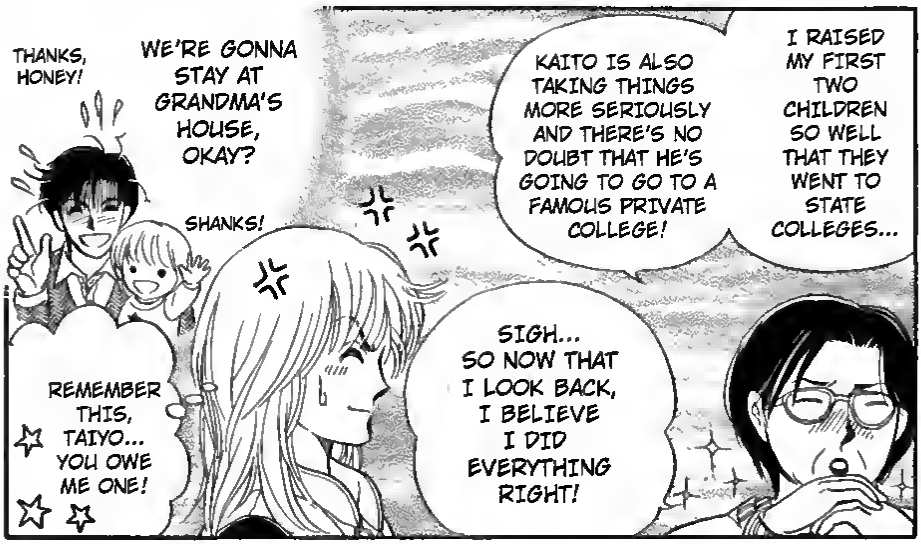
WHAT BRINGS ALL OF YOU HERE?
GET OUT OF MY BUSINESS !!
AND STOP CALLING ME "LIL"!
IS HINAMI NOT AROUND?


WHAT? OH, WOW! YOU REALLY SHOULDN'T HAVE!
WE BROUGHT SOME SWEETS SINCE YOU INVITED US BEFORE.
IT'S A THANK YOU GIFT.

...
OUR... OUR DEAR KOTA?!
AN EVENING JOB?!
BEING WITH SHADY COMPANY ...?!

SEE YOU LATER, WONDER!
BUT THANKS FOR GOING THROUGH THE TROUBLE!
ARF!


BACK WHEN I MARRIED INTO THE HINAMI FAMILY, I WAS 22...
THE YEAR BEFORE, HIS PARENTS HAD DIED, SO THERE WASN'T ANY OF THAT HARDSHIP WITH THE IN-LAWS...
BUT STILL, THAT WAS WHEN TAIYO WAS A FIFTH GRADER IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, AND HIS OLDER SISTER WAS A JUNIOR HIGH STUDENT. AT THAT TIME, THEIR GRANDMOTHER WAS STILL QUITE HEALTHY.
TAKING CARE OF MY OLDEST DAUGHTER, WHO WAS BORN THE FOLLOWING YEAR, WAS TRULY SOME OF THE MOST JOYOUS YEARS OF MY LIFE.
BLAH!
BLAH!
BLAH!


I RAISED MY FIRST TWO CHILDREN SO WELL THAT THEY WENT TO STATE COLLEGES...
KAITO IS ALSO TAKING THINGS MORE SERIOUSLY AND THERE'S NO DOUBT THAT HE'S GOING TO GO TO A FAMOUS PRIVATE COLLEGE!
SIGH... SO NOW THAT I LOOK BACK, I BELIEVE I DID EVERYTHING RIGHT!
WE'RE GONNA STAY AT GRANDMA'S HOUSE, OKAY?
THANKS, HONEY!
SHANKS!
REMEMBER THIS, TAIYO... YOU OWE ME ONE!

I'M SURE SOMEONE LIKE YOU, WHO HAD AN EASY COUPLES' LIFE FROM THE START, WOULDN'T UNDERSTAND, BUT...
EVER SINCE THAT TAIYO GOT INTO COLLEGE HERE, HE DOESN'T EVEN COME NEAR HIS HOMETOWN ANYMORE!
NOW I'M NOT SAYING HE'S UNGRATEFUL, BUT MY HUSBAND AND I ARE LIKE FOSTER PARENTS TO HIM, YOU KNOW?
THAT'S NOT WHAT I HEARD... AFTER TAIYO'S GRANDMOTHER DIED, TAIYO NO LONGER HAD A PLACE TO STAY IN THE HOUSE, SO HE TOOK THE OPPORTUNITY TO LEAVE AFTER GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL.
AND HIS OLDER SISTER, GOING OFF DOING THINGS THAT THE WHOLE WORLD WOULD CONSIDER SHAMEFUL!
...IT REALLY WAS ALL BECAUSE THEIR PARENTS DIED TOO EARLY...
HUH...?
I'M GOING TO THE MAIN HOUSE. DO YOU WANT ANYTHING?
ふわあ
YAWWWN!
HMM... I'LL HAVE A COFFEE!

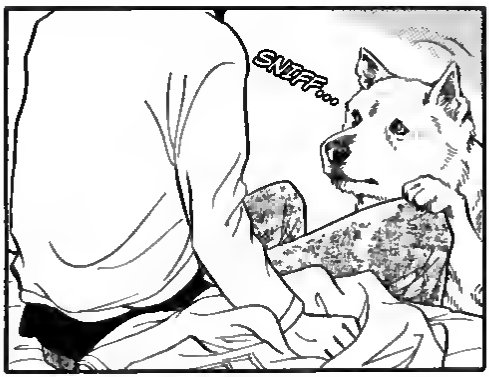
EVEN I BECAME THE LAUGHING STOCK OF THE NEIGHBOR-HOOD!
THEY'D SAY I RAN HER OUT OF TOWN! CAN YOU IMAGINE?
JUST 'CAUSE YOUR MAN THREW YOU AWAY DOESN'T MEAN YOU CAN JUST COME BACK HOME AFTER ALL THAT!
WHAT DO I MEAN ...?
WELL, ISN'T IT OBVIOUS ?!
SHE WAS SIXTEEN WHEN SHE ELOPED WITH A MAN! IN THAT KIND OF SMALL TOWN IN THE COUNTRY, WORD TRAVELS!
THAT'S WHY I MADE IT VERY CLEAR!
I TOLD HER, "IF YOU CARE AT ALL FOR THIS FAMILY, DON'T SHOW YOUR FACE HERE EVER AGAIN!"

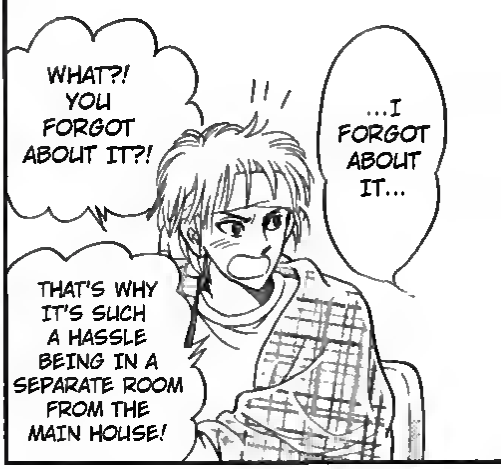
SHE... SHE RETURNED HOME?
KOTA'S MOTHER ?!
YES! JUST BEFORE THAT BOY OF HERS WAS BORN!
I REMEMBER IT WELL SINCE I WAS PREGNANT WITH KAITO AT THE TIME!
EMBARRASS...
MY HUSBAND IS ALWAYS AT WORK ...
SO IF OTHERS ASKED, I'D HAVE TO SAY HE'S THAT "FATHERLESS CHILD", AM I RIGHT?
I WASN'T GONNA LET HER EMBARRASS US ANY MORE THAN SHE ALREADY DID! I MAY HAVE BEEN HER SISTER-IN-LAW, BUT THIS WAS JUST TOO DISGRACEFUL!

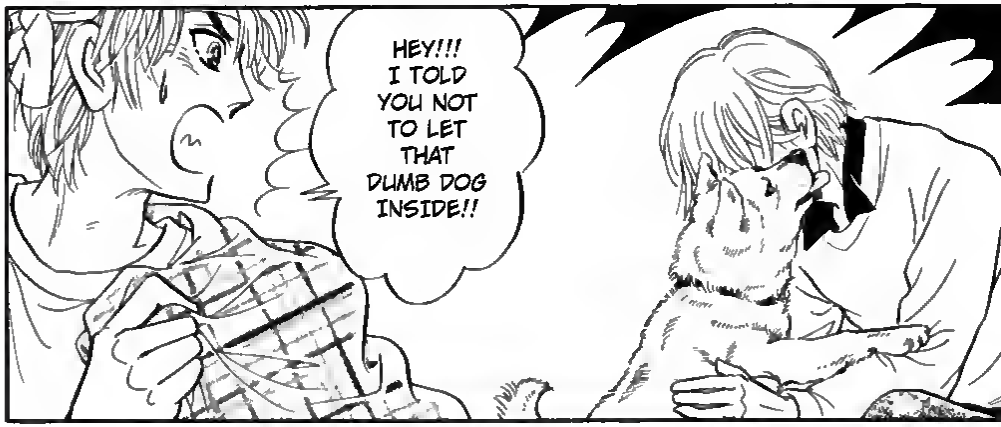
SHE CAME TO HER HOMETOWN LOOKING FOR HELP AND SUPPORT ...
WELL, OF COURSE I DID! I GAVE HER SOME MONEY, TOO, YOU KNOW?!
AND YOU JUST CUT HER OUT?
SO... YOU JUST SLAMMED THE DOOR ON YOUR PREGNANT SISTER-IN-LAW?!
...A WOMAN WHO...
...WAS CARRYING A BABY JUST LIKE YOU?!
THAT GOES WITHOUT SAYING !!
I MEAN, SHE ENDED UP DEAD BECAUSE SHE WAS CAUSING TROUBLE WITH ONE OF THE PATRONS AT HER BAR, AM I RIGHT?!
I CAN'T EVEN IMAGINE SUCH A WORTHLESS PERSON BEING IN THE SAME CIRCLE AS ME!
...!!

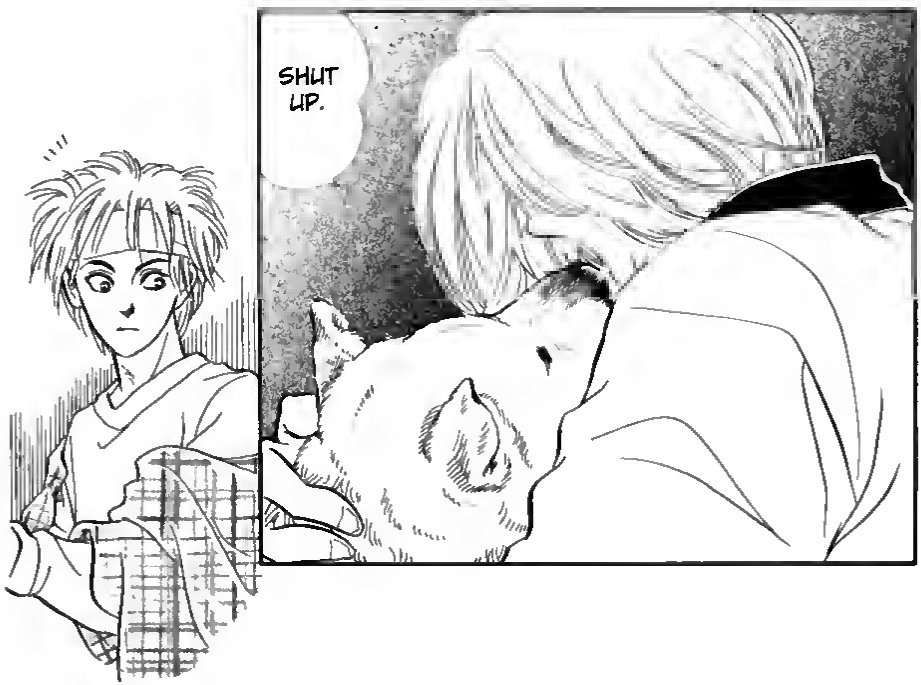
...I GET IT...
WITH IN-LAWS LIKE YOU...
I CAN SEE WHY BOTH KOTA'S MOTHER AND TAIYO WANTED TO LEAVE THEIR HOMETOWN.
WHAT... WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
...I... I WOULD LIKE TO THROW BOTH YOU AND YOUR SELFISH SON OUT OF MY HOUSE THIS INSTANT!
BUT... I CAN'T DO ANYTHING UNTIL THE ENTRANCE EXAM...
IF ONLY FOR KAITO'S FUTURE ...
HOWEVER... AS LONG AS YOU'RE HERE... DO NOT EVER LET KOTA HEAR ANYTHING LIKE WHAT YOU JUST SAID...

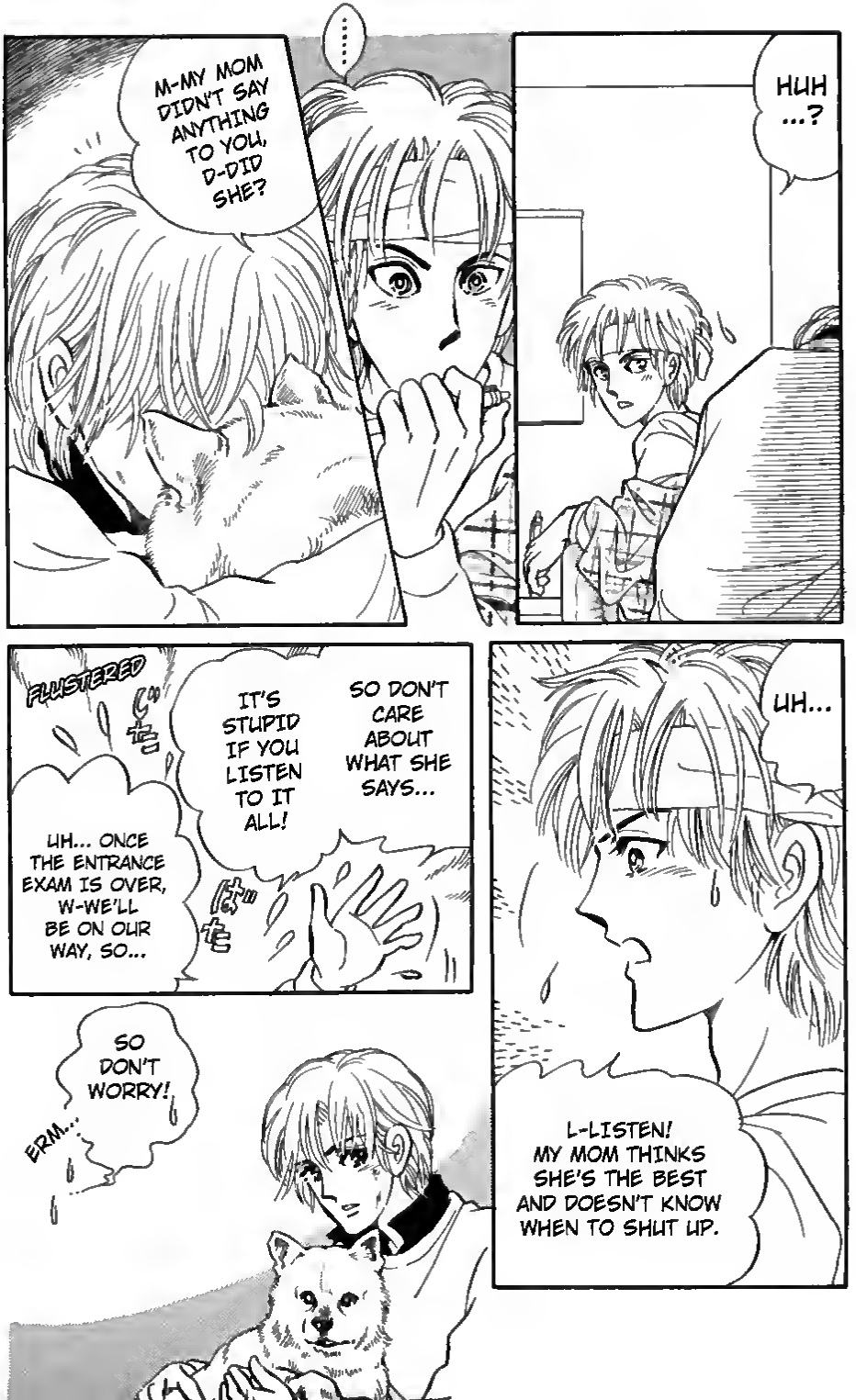
BUT IF YOU PUSH ME, I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WILL DO!
I MIGHT HAVE ALSO HAD A WARPED CHILDHOOD, BUT I KNOW WHEN I SHOULD AND SHOULD NOT SPEAK.
.....
HEY! YOU DIDN'T BRING MY COFFEE?


SNIFF...

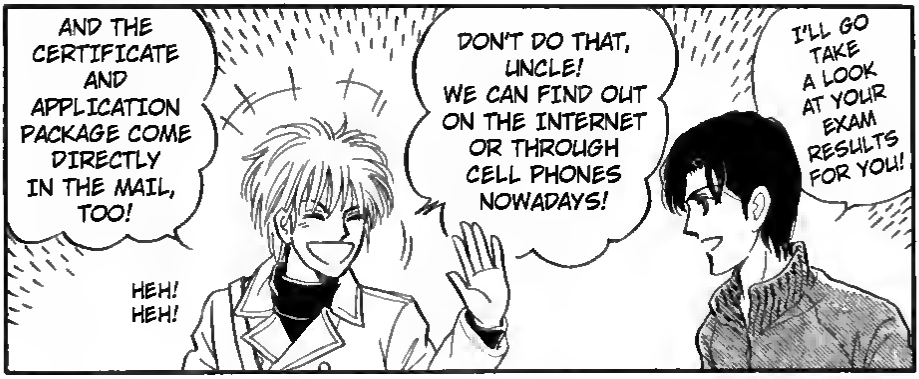

...I FORGOT ABOUT IT...
WHAT?! YOU FORGOT ABOUT IT?!
THAT'S WHY IT'S SUCH A HASSLE BEING IN A SEPARATE ROOM FROM THE MAIN HOUSE!


HEY!!! I TOLD YOU NOT TO LET THAT DUMB DOG INSIDE!!


SHUT UP.


M-MY MOM DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING TO YOU, D-DID SHE?
HUH ...?
FLUSTERED
IT'S STUPID IF YOU LISTEN TO IT ALL!
SO DON'T CARE ABOUT WHAT SHE SAYS...
UH... ONCE THE ENTRANCE EXAM IS OVER, W-WE'LL BE ON OUR WAY, SO...
UH...
L-LISTEN! MY MOM THINKS SHE'S THE BEST AND DOESN'T KNOW WHEN TO SHUT UP.
SO DON'T WORRY!
ERM...

SO AFTER THE EXAM, WE'RE GOING STRAIGHT HOME, RIGHT?
WELL, THAT'S WHAT YOU WANTED, RIGHT, KAITO?
ARGH! C'MON! YOU DON'T BOTHER YOUR KID WHEN HE'S TRYING TO STUDY FOR HIS ENTRANCE EXAM!!
YEAH ...


AND THE CERTIFICATE AND APPLICATION PACKAGE COME DIRECTLY IN THE MAIL, TOO!
HEH! HEH!
DON'T DO THAT, UNCLE! WE CAN FIND OUT ON THE INTERNET OR THROUGH CELL PHONES NOWADAYS!
I'LL GO TAKE A LOOK AT YOUR EXAM RESULTS FOR YOU!

AND IT'S NOT LIKE I'LL EVER BE BACK HERE TO RETAKE THIS EXAM...
MAN.. I STILL HAVEN'T GIVEN YOU YOUR PAYBACK, KOTA...

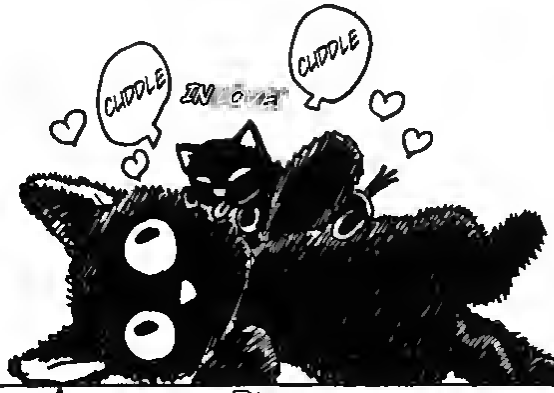
WELL, LATER!
YUP!
WOOF!
"PAYBACK"...?
DON'T GO SO FAR AHEAD, KAITO!
BYE-BYE!!
STEP
STEP

WELL, THINGS HAVE CHANGED ALONG THE WAY...
YOU MEAN WHEN KOTA CAME?
HUH ?
BEFORE MIYA WAS BORN, REMEMBER WE SAID WE'D BE A COUPLE WHO WOULDN'T TIE EACH OTHER DOWN? WELL, I REALIZE THAT WAS MORE MEANT FOR YOU THAN FOR ME.
I DIDN'T KNOW THAT YOU WERE THE ONE WHO DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE FAMILY TIES, TAIYO...
WHEN I MET KOTA AT MY SISTER'S FUNERAL FOR THE FIRST TIME...
THE SISTER I DRIFTED APART FROM...
YEAH ...
DO YOU WANT TO COME WITH US?

WE REALLY NEEDED KOTA IN OUR LIVES.
I REALIZED ...
THAT I REALLY DID WANT TO HAVE A FAMILY!
.....
DID THEY FINALLY LEAVE? THAT NOISY MOTHER AND SON?!
THANK GOD!
GOOD MORNING!
YOU MUST HAVE HAD IT REALLY ROUGH, HAVING AN IN-LAW WITH A SHARP TONGUE LIKE THAT!
I FEEL FOR YOU...
HEH! HEH HEH!
HOW WOULD YOU KNOW?! YOU'RE THE MOTHER-IN-LAW WITH THE SHARP TONGUE!
END OF CHAPTER 13

ABOUT NYAN.

MISHAN HAS LOVED KURO SINCE FIRST COMING HOME AT THREE MONTHS OF AGE!



KURO, THE STUFFED KITTY IS THE PRECIOUS SIDEKICK OF MISHAN!

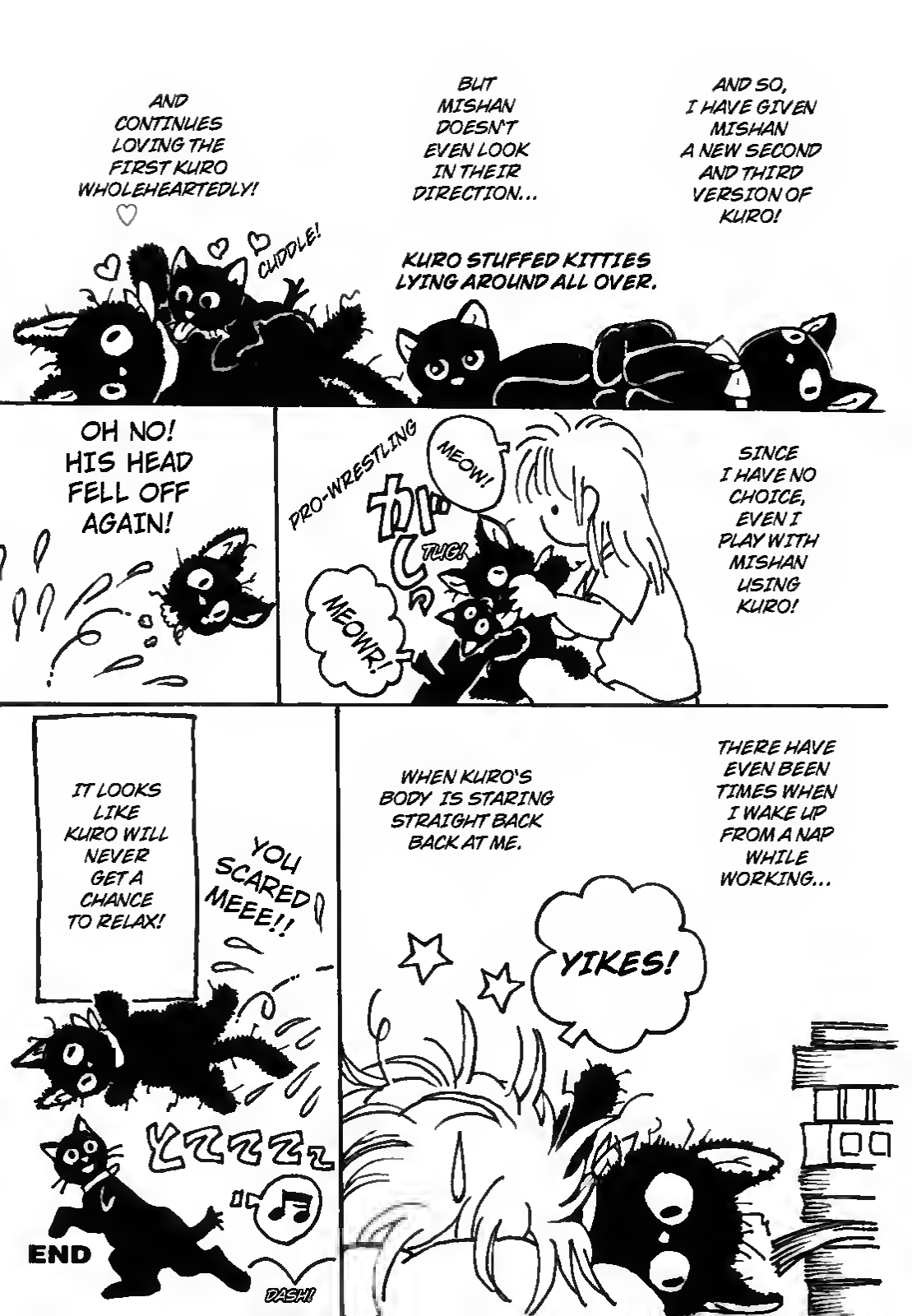
ONCE EVERY DAY, KURO WILL BE MISHAN'S PUNCHING BAG OF FRUSTRATION!

"PRECIOUS", YOU SAY?

KURO WAS LOVED IN SO MANY WAYS THAT HE IS NOW RAGGEDY.

AND SOMETIMES, KURO IS PUSHED BACK DOWN.

WHEN MISHAN WANTS TO SLEEP, KURO IS TAKEN UP THE SECOND FLOOR.


AND CONTINUES LOVING THE FIRST KURO WHOLEHEARTEDLY!
CUDDLE!
BUT MISHAN DOESN'T EVEN LOOK IN THEIR DIRECTION...
AND SO, I HAVE GIVEN MISHAN A NEW SECOND AND THIRD VERSION OF KURO!
KURO STUFFED KITTIES LYING AROUND ALL OVER.
OH NO! HIS HEAD FELL OFF AGAIN!
PRO-WRESTLING
MEOW!
TACKLE
MEOWR!
SINCE I HAVE NO CHOICE, EVEN I PLAY WITH MISHAN USING KURO!
IT LOOKS LIKE KURO WILL NEVER GET A CHANCE TO RELAX!
YOU SCARED MEEE!!
ZZZZZ
END
DASH!
WHEN KURO'S BODY IS STARING STRAIGHT BACK BACK AT ME.
THERE HAVE EVEN BEEN TIMES WHEN I WAKE UP FROM A NAP WHILE WORKING...
YIKES!